TALES OF THE OLD REGIME

BY PRICE WARUNG

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WE GATHER THE HONEY OF WISDOM FROM THORNS, NOT FROM FLOWERS.

NOBILITY OF LIFE.

"Who best can suffer, best can do." MILTON.

What alone enables us to draw a just moral from the tale of life?

"*Were I asked what best dignifies the present and consecrates the past; what alone enables us to draw a just moral from the Tale of Life; what sheds the purest light upon our reason; what gives the firmest strength to our religion; what is best fitted to soften the heart of man and elevate his soul—I would answer with Lassues, it is 'EXPERIENCE.'*"

LORD LYTTON.

"QUEEN'S HEAD HOTEL, NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE.

"SIR,—Will you to-day allow me to present you with this Testimonial and Poem on ENO'S justly celebrated 'FRUIT SALT?' My occupation being a very sedentary one, I came here to see what change of air would do for me, and, at the wish of some *personal friends*, I have taken your 'FRUIT SALT,' and the good result therefrom is my reason for addressing you.

"I am, Sir, yours truly, "A LADY."

"The appetite it will enforce,
And help the system in its course;
Perhaps you've ate or drank too much,
It will restore like magic touch.
Depression, with its fearful sway,
It drives electric-like away;
And if the Blood is found impure,
It will effect a perfect cure.

"Free from danger, free from harm,
It acts like some magician's charm
At any time a dainty draught,
Which will dispel disease's shaft;
More priceless than the richest gold,
That ever did its wealth unfold;
And all throughout our native land
Should always have it at command."

From the late Rev. J. W. NEIL, Holy Trinity Church, North Shields:—

"DEAR SIR,—As an illustration of the beneficial effects of ENO'S 'FRUIT SALT,' I give you particulars of the case of one of my friends. Sluggish liver and bilious headache so affected him, that he was obliged to live upon only a few articles of diet, and to be most sparing in their use. This did nothing in effecting a cure, although persevered in for some twenty-five years, and also consulting very eminent members of the faculty. By the use of your 'FRUIT SALT,' he now enjoys vigorous health; he has never had a headache nor constipation since he commenced to use it, and can partake of his food in a hearty manner. There are others to whom your remedy has been so beneficial, that you may well extend its use *pro bono publico*. I find it makes a very refreshing and invigorating drink.—I remain, dear Sir, yours faithfully,

"J. W. NEIL."

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TALES OF THE OLD REGIME

Tales of the Old Regime

AND THE BULLET OF THE FATED TEN

BY

PRICE WARUNG

London
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Broadway, Ludgate Hill
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Butler & Tanner,
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Tales of the Old Regime

"MR. POUNCE, WRITER AND FORGER"

ALL the trouble arose through Copper-plate Josephs' little joke, and it is accordingly necessary to say a few words about Copper-plate Josephs himself.

That inimitable artist in bank-note engraving, having, in the judgment of the Governor and directors of the Bank of England, reached so eminent a degree of proficiency in his profession as to render it (in the interests of their dividends) very desirable that he should be expatriated, had been a resident of Old Sydney for a year or two. His fame had preceded him, and as, from the circumstances attending his conviction, he was to be freed the moment he

set foot upon the shores of the new Britannia of the Southern World, it cannot be said that the intimation of his arrival had imparted much pleasure to Mr. D'Arcy Wentworth, President of the Bank of New South Wales, and the other magnates of banking circles.

"Have you heard, Mackaness," asked the gentlemanly veteran, "that that rascally bank-note forger Josephs is being sent out?"

"Yes, Mr. Wentworth; my last *Times* said that he had been respited as a preliminary to transporting him. There seems to be something peculiar about his conviction. There was no direct evidence against him."

"That's my own impression!" replied the ex-Police Magistrate, ex-Principal Surgeon, and ex-twenty other functionaries, and present Bank President. "Seems to me they've only got moral evidence against him, but have succeeded in frightening him so that he'll come out for good. P'r'aps they'll give him a grant and his freedom. If they do, we'll have to watch him."

"Certainly!" said Solicitor Mackaness; "he'll have to be watched in any case."

Consequently, when the celebrated note-forger having been "morally" convicted on purchased evidence—in those days perjurers stood for hire

at per hour within the precincts of the Old Bailey—condemned to death, respited, and "sent out," was duly dropped by the transport ship *Hercules* into an armed guard-boat which palpitated gently on the "lucid bosom" of Sydney Cove, he was the recipient of much anxious care.

"Josephs, Henry, life, ship's No. 23—To Governor at once," cried the Principal Superintendent's clerk. And into General Ralph Darling's august presence went the specially honoured Josephs. With the Governor were Sheriff Macquoid and Banker Wentworth.

"Josephs," said his Excellency, "his Lordship, the Secretary of State for Colonial Affairs, has been pleased to direct me to extend you his Most Gracious Majesty's clemency, on conditions. On conditions, Josephs!"

Josephs, sulky and glum, simply ducked his head. He wasn't going to be thankful for nothing, wasn't Convict Josephs.

"These are that, on your undertaking never to follow your trade, you are to be granted two hundred acres of land and your temporary freedom."

Josephs was not surprised. He had been told as much "at home." He was not even grateful.

"Do you promise, my man?" questioned his precise and prim Excellency.

"S'pose I must, sir. Needs must when the devil drives."

The assembled group exchanged mutual glances of surprise and horror. That the transport should associate magnanimous Sir Ralph with that Other Excellent Pro-Consul who should have been nameless to polite ears—Awful!!

"Sir!" Sir Ralph drew himself up to his uttermost quarter-inch. "Sir!"

"Meant no offence, your Honour——"

"Your Excellency," corrected Mr. D'Arcy Wentworth. Very obliging always was the veteran, and he was never above showing a courtesy to a convict. Even when he ordered a flogging, he was so suave and affable that, as often as not, he would elicit from the floggee a "Thank you, sir!" To which the good old man would respond, "You're quite welcome, my man!"

"No offence, your Excellency. Only I've been 'ardly treated, sir!"

"On shipboard?"

"No, your Excellency. But by the Court at 'ome, sir——"

"Oh, I can't hear anything as to that. Every transport says the same thing. Doesn't he, Mr. Macquoid?"

"Never knew one yet who didn't say he was innocent, your Excellency!" answered the Sheriff.

"But I *am* innocent! They've sent me out on suspicion!" persisted the engraver.

* * * *

Here let us digress to remark that this was a fact, and the dignitaries present all knew it. The Bank would have hanged Josephs if it could for the forgery of certain hundred-pound notes, and only the circumstance that the Threadneedle Street authorities had nothing to go upon except a microscopic dot in the concave of the "£," which mark was supposed to be the sign by which Josephs, proud, like all good workmen, of his work, sought to identify his peculiar achievements, had prevented the realization of their amiable wish. But, though the Bank could not hang him, it had influence enough to transport him, His Majesty's Attorney-General doubtless bringing up his mind to the commission of so slight an illegality by the consideration that in sending Josephs to the

New World he was doing Josephs a kindly service. "Josephs," he probably thought, "will be sure to be hanged sooner or later if he is freed here, while if he goes out there he can't fall into temptation, as there are no Banks there!" In fact, we might safely go farther and assert the Right Honourable Attorney-General said as much, for such remarks were constantly made at the time, and later, by British officialdom. There were few officers of State, fewer still of the magistracy, but believed they were doing the best for a man in transporting him. And, as to the opinion as to the banking facilities enjoyed at Botany Bay, why, we find that when Lord Glenelg, at a much later time, was appending his signature to a charter for an Australian Bank, he expressed his hope that "the barbaric system of barter would thereupon cease in the colony." Which remark, emanating from a Secretary for the Colonies, was profoundly suggestive of the wisdom with which Britain has governed her dependencies. Governor and distinguished Gaoler Hampton, of Western Australian and Van Demonian fame, used to express his notion of Colonial Secretaries' intelligence by remarking that, had they been convict-cooks, they could not have stolen the men's rations

without detection. In other words, they were imbeciles.

This is, we say, a digression. And having ended it, we proceed to state that Copper-plate Josephs accepted freedom, two hundred acres on the Hawkesbury, and the condition that, unless specially ordered by certain prominent officials, he was never to pursue his profession.

* * * *

The sapient Authorities did not ask how Copper-plate Josephs was to live. An artist who had spent thirty years over the sandbag with burin, and graver, and burnisher was scarcely likely to make a success as a farmer; but, obviously, it was no concern of the Powers to ascertain how Convict Josephs proposed, his tools of trade being withdrawn, to keep body and soul together. And, to tell the truth, Convict Josephs did not trouble about himself sufficiently to put the question to the Authorities. Had he not made, *en voyage*, perfect arrangements for the transmission of certain "flash 'uns" to the counting-houses of the village by the Thames? Ah! if the old walls of the "Help me through the World" Inn, in Fitzgerald Street, Windsor, had chosen to speak, they could have "put away" very nicely, not

merely Mr. Copper-plate Josephs, but a certain young transport-ship surgeon who made numerous trips to and fro the dear old land. But then, you see, the old bricks did not vocalise their reminiscences, and consequently both Josephs and his friend and "worker-off," the doctor, lived long and prosperously, and died piously with their boots off.

The sapient Authorities did not bother their heads as to the engraver's livelihood. They did no more than enter into an agreement, through Mr. Mackaness, with venerable Mr. Pounce, that he should watch over Mr. Josephs with a tender solicitude.

"It's a sound rule, Mr. Wentworth," advised Mr. Mackaness, "to set a thief to catch a thief. Put Pounce, the forger, to watch Josephs, the forger, and if either goes wrong the other'll split. They'll be rivals in a week." Upon this advice the Powers acted.

* * * *

It did not take a week to generate a first-class, though disguised, enmity between the brothers in "advanced penmanship," as Mr. Timothy Pounce, in his moments of conviviality, was wont to term the noble art and mystery of forgery. For, though Mr. Pounce's specialty

was the manipulation of documents, and Mr. Josephs' *forte* was "bank notes from the plate," it is, perhaps, superfluous to say that both gentlemen were possessed of so intelligent and fertile an ingenuity that if the preparation of a will, a land-grant, or a pardon did not present insuperable obstacles to Mr. Josephs' talents, neither was Mr. Pounce ignorant of the process of manufacturing "flash 'uns." And Mr. Pounce felt deeply aggrieved that just as he had succeeded in working up a really lucrative connection among Civil Servants and 'Mancipists who wanted the signatures imitated of Governors and Members of Council, and among transports who wished tickets-of-leave and pardons that would pass muster a few years *before* they would be gazetted in due course, Mr. Josephs should be imported to interfere with his monopoly.

* * * *

Copper-plate Josephs, on receiving an interim certificate of freedom, had installed himself at Johnny Blackman's "Keep within Compass" Hotel, in George Street, and thither Mr. Pounce, instructed by Mr. John Mackaness, wended his way one afternoon.

Of tall and bulky form, Mr. Pounce was benign and venerable in aspect, and it was with a

dignified courtliness which would have reflected grace upon an English Duke or a colonial Muster-master that he handed his card to the landlord.

"Take that, John, please," he ordered, "to—h'm—newly-freed transport Josephs. I believe he has put up here. And, John, as a friend, you know, I would advise you to be more careful as to what characters you accommodate. Licensing-day is coming close, and the assessors are inclined to be severe."

Johnny, as he delivered his card, felt greatly impressed with this exhortation. He was an old friend of Pounce's, having come out in the same vessel with him. Pounce was a "lifer," while Johnny was only a seven-year man, and therefore the publican looked up to the "penman" and revered him. In the curious topsy-turvy society which the Blessed Spirit of British Colonisation built up in Old Sydney, nothing was more amusing than the deference which "short-termers" paid to long-sentence men. A twenty-year man was to the seven and ten-year fellows an object of respect; a "lifer" was elevated on a pedestal of reverence; while it is by no means certain that they would not have bowed the knee to a worthy whose "drop"-rope

had been cut after he had done a preliminary swing or two, but before life was extinct.

* * * *

"Gentleman to see you!" said the landlord to Josephs brusquely. Blackman's tones were not so civil as they had been earlier in the day, and Mr. Josephs was not slow to perceive the difference. Mr. Blackman had been influenced by Pounce's hint. And the new chum knew it, for Mr. Pounce's words had been distinctly audible to the engraver through the partition which separated the bar from the bar-parlour. He took the card from Blackman.

"Oh, Mr. Pounce, Writing Clerk. You don't call 'im a gentleman, d'ye, landlord? Why, that's old Pounce, I'll swear, who was lagged for doing some 'dummy old ooman's tickets!'[1] 'Im a gentleman, indeed. Why, I'm surprised ye allow such characters into your bar, landlord, 'specially as licensing-day is so close, and the assessors are so severe. For, d'ye know, landlord, Pounce was not the sort o' man to be content with forging old ooman's tickets, but to save paying three and threepence he forged the name of his wash'woman's daughter to his

[1] "Dummy old ooman's tickets": Forged bank stock-certificates, in convict slang.

wash'woman's bill. That's your Mr. Pounce, landlord. Now show the gentleman in!" With such an accent upon the "gentleman!"

Inasmuch as Mr. Pounce was blessed with the best of good hearings, it will be easily believed that there was no love lost between the two experts from the first moment of their acquaintance.

* * * *

"Mr. Josephs?" queried the venerable, blue-coated, brass-buttoned, and spotless-linened Pounce, bowing.

Mr. Josephs arose, nodded, and desired to be informed what he could do for his visitor.

Mr. Pounce did not at first say, was effusive in his welcome to Mr. Josephs, sorry for his "misfortune"—"but still, y' know, Mr. Josephs, your personal loss is our young country's gain" —was generous in ordering in a full quart of rum, "to, ah, cement our 'quaintance, sir."

"Don't drink rum!" said Mr. Josephs, not to be won over by blandishments.

"Then a glass of port—a bottle of port, John —must have something for the good of the house, y' know, Mr. Josephs."

"Don't drink port, and as for the good of the house, as I pay my bills, Pounce, and as I don't

forge the landlord's name to a receipt, if he ain't satisfied with my custom I can go elsewhere."

"You misunderstand me, Mr. Josephs," rejoined Pounce, outwardly unabashed, but inwardly smarting, "really—you do."

"Can't say I'm sorry if I do. But you ain't said what ye want."

Mr. Pounce motioned Host Blackman to leave the room, and then, drawing his chair nearer to the spot where the other rogue was standing, whispered: "In confidence, my dear sir, I came to propose a bit of business—something that might be mutually profitable."

"What business?—what d'ye mean?"

"'Ush, my dear sir! Mum's the word." And Mr. Pounce lowered his low voice two tones. "Flash 'uns. You print, I'll work off."[1]

In a moment all the love of his old game and all the fascination of a beautiful art, awoke within Copper-plate Josephs. With the one and the other there waked too, however, a doubt of Mr. Pounce. Would that unadulterated scoundrel prove faithful? Might the offer not be a trap to put him away? A man who would forge to evade payment of three and threepence

[1] "Work off": To utter a forged note or "flash-'un."

to a poor woman would surely be capable of anything. No, he wouldn't trust Mr. Pounce, and without troubling to wrap up his resolve in smooth-sounding words, he communicated it to his visitor.

"Not trust me!" expostulated that offended person. "Not trust me after I have put my neck into your hands! Why, you could hang me for what I've said to you already!"

"Fudge! I ain't been a fortnight here without learning you're hand and glove with the gentlemen of the staff. They say you do all Gov'ment's dirty work, and that you'll fix anything from a death-warrant to—to—a wash'woman's bill. Shouldn't be surprised if you've only come 'ere now to trap me. That's my 'pinion of you, Mr. Pounce—Writing Clerk."

And Mr. Pounce, bridling in the consciousness of his insulted virtue and in the knowledge that there rested in his pocket an indemnity signed by a Very High Personage indeed "for having made a felonious proposal to one Henry Josephs," was compelled to go to Mr. Mackaness and inform him that Josephs really meant to walk in the paths of rectitude henceforth.

"He wouldn't bite, Mr. Mackaness," he reported, as he returned the indemnity to the

solicitor (we have seen two or three such documents). "And for the time, at least, he means to go square. But I'll drop in on him occasionally, sir; and if there's anything wrong, he won't get the better of me. No, sir!"

It was in this way that the fears of the Old Sydney bankers, as to possible damaging effects to the genuineness of their note issues accruing from Copper-plate Josephs' residence in His Gracious Majesty's dependency of New South Wales, were allayed. If there is anything in the method that savours of a dubious morality, do not, we pray you, blame the colonists of Old Sydney. Blame, instead, the System, and the lords and gentlemen who, sitting in the snug parlour of No. 14, Downing Street, set in motion the forces which created it.

* * * *

Mr. Pounce was true to his word. Again and again he called on Mr. Josephs, and was ever polite, albeit Josephs was ever the reverse.

It was largely due to Pounce's interest with Mr. Macquoid that "Copper-plate" was permitted to establish himself in a small office in Jamieson Street, and to work under the strictest police supervision for the printers, besides officiating as "Card and Book-plate Engraver

to the Gentry." Pounce wisely pointed out that, once Josephs was allowed to handle his tools, it was only a question of time for him to take to the "flash" business again, and the suggestion commended itself to the Principal Superintendent's and the Sheriff's judgments. Both these high functionaries were shareholders in the local banks, and they were, therefore, particularly solicitous to maintain uncontaminated the purity of the note issues. When an official's public duty travels parallel to his private interests, it is singular how indefatigable and ingenious he will prove in administration. It was about this time that a Legal Great Man of Van Demonia procured the reprieve of another bank-note forger on the condition that the criminal would never forge documents prejudicial to the Old Bank. He would make no stipulation as to other concerns, but as to the Old Bank—never! The Legal Great Man was a heavy stockholder in the Old Bank. The Principal Superintendent and the Sheriff applied a similar principle to "Copper-plate." As he was not yet colonially condemned, they could not well bargain with him that he should leave their bank's interests alone whatever other interests he attacked. But they could throw a temptation or two in his

way, which would have an equal potency. Once he fingered his gravers, Josephs, looking at the official experience of like artists, would not be long before he tripped and stumbled, and then —hey ho for the George Street scaffold, and in the one instant the banks would "drop" Convict Josephs and all fears of a spurious note-circulation.

Pounce visited Josephs freely and frequently. He put little jobs in his way, and trusted to the future to make up for the temporary loss—the future when Josephs having been hanged, he, Pounce, would once more enjoy a monopoly. Truth to say, he was very desirous Josephs should lose no time in getting hanged, or at least transported to Norfolk Island. Pounce's schedule of charges was as follows :—

1. For Absolute Pardon, with *Gazette* notice, £30.
2. For Absolute Pardon, without *Gazette* notice, £20.
3. For Conditional Pardon, with *Gazette* notice, £25.
4. For Conditional Pardon, without *Gazette* notice, £15.
5. Ticket-of-Leave, new form complete, with identity exact, and *Gazette* notice, £15.
6. Ticket-of-Leave, without *Gazette* notice, £10.
7. Ticket-of-Leave, dead or absconded prisoner's form altered as far as possible, £7 7*s*.
8. Pass to visit Country, 3 or 6 months, or Country to visit Town, £3 3*s*.

9. English Marriage Certificate, £2 2*s*.
10. English Certificate of Death, £2 2*s*.
11. English Letters from Home Friends, £2 2*s*.
12. Pass from V.D.L., £2 2*s*.
13. Letter from V.D.L., £1 1*s*.

But Copper-plate Josephs' fees were, in every case, 25 per cent. less than Pounce's scale, and the new man's policy of cutting prices had seriously affected the old-established business.

Of course, Josephs was not up in the minutiæ of traffic in forged freedoms and so forth. It took years of experience and careful study of men and papers to concoct a document that would invariably pass muster—using the term in its most literal sense—as it was the Muster-master's duty to examine every convict's "personal papers." And Josephs had not the tact and *bonhomie* to enlist the alliance of the necessary officers of the Regulation Departments, or the knowledge of routine obligatory if he would avert from the transport who had paid him his fee the dreadful consequences of presenting false papers for examination. Still, the average transport who wished to abscond up-country or to Van Demonia with "regular" papers would look at the difference in the rates. He perhaps could not understand that it would be the wiser course

to pay Pounce £30 for a Free Pardon, properly sealed and signed, and not only sealed and signed, but *registered* and GAZETTED as well! —how this sort of thing was done we shall tell you some other day—than to fee Josephs in the sum of £22 10*s.* for a similar document in which there was some defect. The average transport, in a word, could not always estimate the superior quality of Forger Pounce's work, and it was no wonder, therefore, that Forger Pounce's income was decreasing, that he was sincerely anxious that his rival in the art of penmanship should be speedily hanged or otherwise put out of the way, or that, to this admirable end, he laboured assiduously, if somewhat secretly.

But Providence was not friendly to Mr. Pounce, though he went to church twice every Sunday, and Josephs had 'verted to Catholicism so that he might go only the once.[1] Providence was, indeed, distinctly unfriendly to the

[1] It was quite a common practice for Protestant transports to become Catholics in order to escape the double Protestant service on Sunday, the Catholics being required to attend once only. In July, 1827, over 200 Protestants, barracked at Hyde Park, adverted to Mother Church for this reason, but on the fact reaching the ears of the Governor, they were compelled to re-change their faith!

former, inasmuch as Forger Pounce did not succeed in deluding "Copper-plate" into any one of the numerous traps which he laid for that naughty man, but himself tumbled head first into the solitary pitfall which Forger Josephs took the trouble to prepare for his venerable rival. Which, after all, wasn't so much a pitfall as a little joke.

* * * *

Mr. Timothy Pounce was of refined instincts, and very natty in his personal appointments. He delighted in little knick-knacks, such as tassels to his cane and charms to his watch-guard. His penknife—most trustworthy ally in matters of erasure!—bore a tiny silver tablet, on which his name was inscribed. And, stepping into David Mazière's shop in George Street one day, and observing in a counter-box a charming little card-case with just such another tablet thereon, the idea occurred to him that the little case would not only prove a convenient accessory to his comfort, but would furnish him with another excuse for visiting Mr. Copper-plate Josephs. The two silver dollars necessary to transfer the case from the counter to his pocket were forthwith handed over—and Mr. Pounce proceeded to Jamieson Street,

"Ah! *good* morning, Mr. Josephs. Delighted to see you looking so well. And how's business, and could you manage without inconvenience during the next day or two just to engrave my name on this card-case?"

"Sixpence a letter," grunted Josephs, otherwise unresponsive to his patron's seductive address.

"H'm, isn't that rather high? Especially as I'm—he! he!—in the trade?"

"My terms! You ain't in the trade!"

"Ah, well, if you must, you must. 'Timothy Pounce,' in Old English, please, Mr. Josephs; and when can I get it?"

"Day after to-morrow. Cash, six and six, before delivery."

"I don't think you need be anxious as to your money, Mr. Josephs. It's not my fault we have not done much more business together. There's a little matter now I'd like to mention——"

"Too busy to talk. Talk next time."

And Mr. Pounce left the shop in as dignified a manner as was possible. Bless us, how he did swear, though, as he crossed the vacant ground by St. Phillip's!

* * * *

He would, perchance, have sworn a little louder and longer if he could have had any notion of the sequel.

Naturally, as soon as he had purchased his new card-case, he had transferred to it his bits of pasteboard. Each of these, in his own beautiful and perfect writing, was thus inscribed :—

Timothy Pounce,
Writing Clerk,
Macquarie Street.

Documents of all kinds drafted and written. Legal work a speciality.

Never thinking, in leaving the case with Josephs, he had also left the cards. Even the devil is not always wide-awake.

Opening the case an hour or two later, as a preliminary to executing his rival's commission, "Copper-plate" observed the cards, drew one out, looked at it, and—smiled. Gruff in manner and short in temper as Mr. Josephs was, somewhere or other in his system there lurked an atom of humour which prompted him, though he was really busy (having a very important job

in hand for Mrs. Chester, of Chesterdale,[1] to waste his afternoon in engraving a copper-plate in this fashion :—

Timothy Pounce,
Writer and Forger,
Macquarie Street.

Documents of all kinds forged and uttered. Pardons a speciality.

When he had printed off twenty cards he mixed them with Pounce's pen-written ones. A superficial glance failed to distinguish the one description from the other—the engraved from the manuscript. A close one, of course, discovered the difference in the wording ; but as to the words which were to be found on both cards, they were identical to a segment of a curve, and to the position of an i-dot. And, mixed just as they were, but with a couple of Mr. Pounce's own scripts on the top, the humorous Josephs filled the card-case with the lot.

* * * *

[1] See *The Bulletin*, February 28 and March 14, 1891 : "The Pure Merinoes' Ball" and "Marie Antoinette's Fandango."

Never since he had boarded with her had Mrs. Bevan—widow of the poor wretch Bevan, who was ruthlessly shot as an absconder by soldiers in February, 1829, while engaged in honourable labour—seen Copper-plate Josephs so genial as he was that evening.

"You are merry, sir," she ventured to say.

"Yes, Mrs. Bevan, I'm rather in good spirits to-night. A rather funny thing happened to-day."

"May I not hear it, sir?" quoth the curious dame.

"Well, well, not just at present, ma'am. Some day p'r'aps I'll tell you."

He never did, though. Nor did he tell the whole story when ten days later he was interrogated in the Supreme Court when Timothy Pounce was on trial for his life for forgery of a Conditional Pardon—a little ceremony which poor Pounce was compelled to undergo as a consequence of having handed to Captain Charles Sturt, 39th Regiment, without looking at it, a card from his new case.

What man or woman is there who, as he or she hands a servant or a stranger a card from his or her own case, invariably looks at it?

Mr. Pounce did not look at the pasteboard,

which, bowing the while in the grand manner, he handed Captain Sturt, as he was tendering his assistance in copying for the press the Captain's journals of his expedition into the Interior.

And he had no chance of seeing it again till he was arraigned on the capital charge.

How he was arraigned, and why, being found guilty, he was not hanged, will form a tale for another time.

THE BURIAL AT GOVETT'S LEAP

"TURN out the pris'ners!"

The Sergeant of the Guard revolves on his heel at Lieutenant Achison's order, and passes on the command.

"No. 1—make ready—with elevated muzzle—Fire!" And the right-hand man of the rank of soldiers points his musket to the mist-veiled heavens, and sends the rousing shot echoing through the gorges and valleys.

Before the first echo returns within the Stockade-gate the Civil Side overseers who are standing by the doors of the three caravans (as the men of the Old Régime termed them, "boxes" as a great Bishop called them, and "hells-on-wheels," as they were known among such of the convicts as strove to keep a soul within their bodies) fling open the hinged slabs, and cry, with one voice,—

"Turn out, men; turn out!"

Needless to say the "men" obey. The System has a weakness for facilitating early rising by the "cat." Even on Sundays its children were not allowed that extra snooze which is the prerogative of free Britons on Sunday morning all the world over. Not at least in the forenoon. They could sleep in the afternoon if they wished—and sleep were possible. That to them was the advantage of Sunday. It is a Sunday this day of our story.

* * * *

The Blackheath road-gang is, save one (that at Mount Vittoria[1]), the farthest in location from Sydney of the long line of chain-gangs which are making accessible to a wider civilisation the virgin plains of the Great West. Civilisation has already established some of its refining agencies beyond the Blue Mountains. There is a twofold township at Bathurst —a "bond" side and a "free" (now Kelso), in which are already existent a chapel and a

[1] Records of the late "Twenties" and "Early Thirties" always referred to this historic hill as "Vittoria." "Victoria" was a loyal after-thought of Major Mitchell's, in 1832.

school, a gallows, and at least two sets of triangles—one for military use and the other for the edification of transports. And even beyond Bathurst, the foremost ripples of the advancing waves of settlement and progress are fretting against the Boundary. For, already, at Molong, there is one military-post and a triangles, and at Wellington Valley there is another military-post and another triangles. But the iron-gangs go no further than the Mount as yet.

It is not the important "settlement" that it is to prove a few years hence, this Blackheath Stockade, and its greatness is overshadowed by the Stockade at Mount Vittoria, where the mighty work of cutting the Pass is soon to be begun. Here there are only some thirty-eight prisoners, three overseers, nine soldiers, one sergeant, and one subaltern. At the Mount there are already 150 transports, ten overseers, thirty privates, five "non-coms.," a surgeon, a subaltern and a full captain, and in a year there will be 500 convicts and a corresponding increase in the military strength. But Lieutenant Achison redeems the Blackheath Stockade from insignificance.

The Lieutenant is an altogether exceptional

man, for—will you believe it?—he is beloved by the convicts. Through fire and water would they go for him. In the Invalid Depôt, at Launceston, Tasmania, which the tender heart of a man of the New Régime has surrounded with exquisitely gardened grounds, so that not a few storm-lost convict souls may glide quietly to haven amid placid beauty, we asked, four or five years ago, of an old man this question:—

"Now, tell us, was there never in the old days *any* officer who treated you as well as Mr. Jones does now?"

"Never 'un, sor! On'y, sor, Major Achison wot was left'nant at Black'eath w'en I was on th' roads, oh ever'slong sunce; 'e'd 'a done it, sor, if 'e'd cud!"

"What do you mean," we asked—knowing full well what the reply would be—"by 'if he could'?"

"'Cos th' Systum 'udn't let 'im."

The chasm from the Old to the New Régime, the measureless distance between the Twenties and the Eighties which was yet embraced within the scope of one man's life, had been bridged by the subtle influence of a kindly nature. And the more we learnt of Achison

as he was on the Mountains in the late Twenties and the Early Thirties, at Hobart Town in the Middle Thirties and Forties, and at Norfolk Island in the late Forties, the more we knew of his goodness, the deeper became our conviction that he was an exception—a phenomenon. He hardened as the years rolled on, but, tested by the gauges of the System, he was never hard.

* * * *

It was with a shudder of sympathy that the Lieutenant watched the gangers turn out. Could he but have his wish, he would permit them stop on their planks a little longer, so wretched was their appearance. "These men who had gone to rest overnight physically exhausted by their week's labour! Great heavens—who'd have believed they had *ever* known a sleep!" This was his thought—which entered his head only to be driven out by another thought, that even if he could send them back to their roosting cages, would he do so? And he shuddered again as he reflected that he would not. Why? You shall know part of the reason—the full reason dare not be printed—dare not to be spoken of even—is only to be whispered to grown men when

they discuss the things which were done in the brave days of old.

* * * *

The overseers went down the accursed rank and straightened them for muster. Thirty-five men drew up in the line. The Senior-Overseer, the mustering official, pulled a long narrow book from his pilot-coat pocket, and, saluting, looked towards the Lieutenant, who, catching the glance, muttered the monosyllable:—

"Muster!"

The section of twelve men which issued from No. 1 Caravan was mustered by name and number, and the Senior-Overseer informed the Lieutenant that: "No. 1 is right, sir." He knew it beforehand, did Senior-Overseer Higgs, for "No. 1" was his special charge, and as his men tumbled out from the "hell" into the fresh morning air, he had counted them. That man intended to rise in the Service if he could.

He mustered No. 2. Which was right also.

But No. 3 was not right. Eleven men only reply. James Tinsley, 18, colonial convict, from Van Dieman's Land, is missing. Overseer No. 3 (Dent) looks flurried. He was not particularly ambitious of rising in the System, as he

had fixed his desires on a certain bulky Sydney widow with a small but profitable pot-house, and he was consequently not very alert in details of supervision. Still, to lose a prisoner was dangerous, and as the mustering overseer gazed at him for an explanation, he feels and looks discouraged.

"I'll swear I locked him up last night!" he pleaded in deprecation of the coming rebuke.

The Senior-Overseer faced Lieutenant-in-Command and made report.

"James Tinsley, mustered with No. 3 Van overnight, sir, missing. No. 14 in gang-roll, per Brig *Vansittart* from Hobart Town."

The Lieutenant appeared unmoved. But in his heart he was glad. If only Jim had got away safe!—for he had a genuine liking for one-time merry Jim, had the Lieutenant, and wished him well out of the network of mountains and gorges which had tempted so many transports to freedom—and to death.

"Tinsley, is it? Overseer Dent, what do you say?"

"I locked him up, sir. I did, sir, all right. He was mustered in yes'night."

"Interrogate the men."

The Senior-Overseer turned to the late con-

tents of No. 3 Van, and proceeded to ask for information as to their knowledge of Tinsley's movements.

The first man interrogated "'ad'nt seen 'im since yes'day!" This with a grin.

The second made a like response; so did the third, the fourth, and the fifth; each man grinning as he answered, and exchanging with the others of his section amused glances. There was something behind this similarity of retort, that was evident, and the officials concluded it was a common knowledge of an escape. The soldiers of the guard grew interested as they heard the answers, and a convict—one of the two servants who were not "van'd" overnight—and who was passing to the Lieutenant's hut with a tray of coffee, stopped to learn what was in the wind.

It was the sixth man—Jusan—who let out the little joke. With a laugh as hearty as his wasted frame could emit, looking towards Lieutenant Achison, he said:—

"Why, he's in the van now, is Mary Jane!"

A cackling chorus ran up and down the line; one or two of the soldiers joined boldly in the merriment; the convict with the coffee spilt the liquid as he shared in the laughter;

even the Lieutenant could scarcely forbear to smile. It wasn't half a bad joke, as joking went in convict settlements, thus to take in the Authorities—Senior-Overseer Higgs was an Authority by virtue of Act of Council and Regulation—though it was only for three or four minutes.

Overseer Dent, hearing the words, and not heeding the laughter, sprang impulsively towards the van. The iron-clamped doors of "No. 3" were still apart, and the whole of the people on parade saw his actions, as he peered into the van and then went into it.

They saw him, too, as he emerged, after the sound of a heavy thump on the deck of the vehicle had revealed the fact that he had pulled down—something—from a shelf to the floor.

When he emerged he dragged with him the half-dead carcase of James Tinsley. This was the joke of the contents of Van No. 3. They knew the boy had been on a top-plank all the time.

* * * *

The Senior-Overseer and his junior Dent spoke together in their indignation at the joke.

"Yes, he's here, Mr. Higgs, and Mr. Achison, sir! He's shirking, sir!" This from Dent.

"What did you pris'ners mean by stating you hadn't seen him since yesterday?" This was Higgs' demand.

The first man of No. 3's section answered that he had spoken the truth. He hadn't seen "Mary Jane" since lock-up overnight. He himself was a "bottom-planker," and "Mary Jane" was top, and he was first out that morning. The second man and the third were also bottom-plankers, and they'd take their davys they'd not seen Jim since overnight. Much the same answer came from the others who had before spoken. "The hell was dark," said one, "an' he c'u'dn't see in th' dark!" And the other "'ad felt Jim has 'e was a-gettin' hup, but 'ad never seed the y'ung 'un."

Literally, these answers were true. Once the doors of the vans were banged to, no light could enter into the conveyance, save that which penetrated the double row of holes—one an inch from the decking, the other two inches from the roof, which furnished ventilation, and these were practically closed by the bodies of the convicts who were accommodated on the

top and bottom planks respectively. In the doors were fixed gratings, but an iron lid always dropped over these narrow interstices, unless it was lifted noiselessly by a vigilant overseer—its pivot was kept well oiled to that end—for the purpose of detecting the crime of conversation. It was a grievous crime for conversation to take place between sun-down and sun-up, between occupants of the caravans; very grievous, to be put down with a strong foot.

Literally, these answers were correct. Technically, they were false, and therefore insubordinate. To be insubordinate was to commit the unpardonable sin.

With an angry flush, adding an unnecessary tinge of ruddiness to his fresh features, Senior-Overseer Higgs once more faced the Lieutenant-in-Command.

"I report these men, sir, for prevarication They attempted to deceive me, sir, on specific inquiry. Regulation 43, sir!"

There was a malice in Higgs' tones which every one noticed—every one, that is, except poor Tinsley, who was beyond noticing anything. The prisoners ceased to indulge in their laughter (the very phantom of wholesome mer-

riment), and the Lieutenant's face fell into shadow. The matter had grown serious once a formal complaint was lodged. No matter what the commander thought in such a case, he had no option but to administer the Regulations, which distinctly commanded him to investigate every charge of insubordination or deceit preferred against a prisoner or prisoners when formally made. Next to mutiny, there was nothing the Régime detested so strongly as a lie. The Régime was moral. Achison had blessed in many an instance where the System banned, but he could only do so with safety when he could take advantage of some loophole in the Regulations. Here, on this Sunday morning, trifling though the offence was in his eyes, the Regulations made it serious. And there was no loophole, no shadow of a crack, in Regulation No. 43. So——

"Do you press the charge, Mr. Higgs?" he inquired, after a moment's reflection.

"Yes, sir; I do press it!"

Higgs being an aspirant for increased place and emoluments, considered the System was getting under weigh to the devil if the Law and the Regulations were not enforced with the utmost rigour, and he had a dozen times al-

ready ventured to insinuate to the higher powers that the Lieutenant-in-Command was not sufficiently System-atic. Now that his vanity, that excessively sensitive vanity of the low-class official, had been hurt by the prisoners' paltry joke, he was going to heal the smart on homœopathic principles if he could. Like to like: the prisoners' smarting should cure his own. He pressed the charge.

"Bring them up after breakfast, then, Overseer. Now complete the muster, and report what is the matter with Tinsley."

"No. 14, Tinsley, James — why don't you answer, pris'ner?"

James Tinsley, being in the drowsy stupor which is to precede his last sleep, fails to answer. A pause of a full minute is broken by the Lieutenant:—

"Don't you see he's ill, Mr. Higgs? Report, sir, at once."

"Please, sir, 'Mary Jane'—I mean Tinsley, sir—was a-taken very bad in th' night, sir. He's croakin', sir." The eleventh man of No. 3 Van so speaks.

"Why didn't one of you call out?" demanded the Lieutenant, as he strode towards the sick boy.

The man saluted, as he replied with a grim reminder, "We rec'lected Smith, sir—Smith of the Emu Plains roaders, sir!" (Smith of the Lapstone Hill iron-gang had called out in agony one night for water, and had been given a bayonet by the sentry—as per Regulation. They buried Smith, and possibly—there is no record—reprimanded the sentry. It is also possible they promoted him.)

"Then why not report when you came out?"

Again the man saluted, again he replied, "We hadn't been a-mustered, sir—mustn't speak till mustered!"

"Well!" thought Mr. Higgs, with indignation, "would the Gov'ment believe that a pris'ner had to teach an officer his business!" He'd remember that, he would, and would let it be known in the proper quarter some day, that he would.

* * * *

Lieutenant Achison saw the lad was dying. The hue of the cadaver was gradually stealing over the worn features, and as he gazed the human within him rose, and swept with a tide of pity over the instincts of the Official.

"Here, one of you, off to my quarters, and bring me a flask standing on my shelf."

Of course the command was to the prisoners. No soldier could move; no free officer would think of moving.

Jusan started for the hut with such celerity as his irons would allow. While waiting for the spirit the Lieutenant stooped and raised Tinsley's head. Then he recalled himself to his duty, and speaking to the Senior-Overseer, ordered the men to breakfast.

There was a clanking of irons as the men shuffled half about and stepped slowly to the overhanging shed where the buckets of "smiggins"[1] were waiting to satiate their appetites. There, grouped in messes of six, they dipped their pannikins into the stuff, while the Senior-Overseer read grace, and watched that others did not steal the portions due to Jusan and Tinsley.

Jusan did not return promptly. He could have gone to the hut and return to the spot in front of the caravans in a couple of minutes. The Lieutenant-in-Command grew impatient—the lad was dying—a nip of the whisky might,

[1] An old Newgate term, which was frequently used by road-gangers to describe their ration of rice or maize when it was mixed with the water in which their meat-ration had been boiled.

at least, ease his pain, if it failed to rouse him from his deathly apathy—why did the man not come?

"Dent, see what's up with that pris'ner. Or, stay—hold Tinsley's head."

Higgs, from beneath the shed, was momentarily amazed to see his junior relieve the Lieutenant, and the latter pass rapidly to the hut. The System was, indeed, due for the devil when all this fuss was being kicked up over a sick boy-convict, who was, very likely, not sick at all—only "shamming Abram."

He was not amazed, however, at the next development of affairs. Wise after the event, he remarked to himself that was "just what might have been expected." For a commotion in the neighbourhood of officers' quarters drew his eyes in that direction.

Holding Jusan by the collar with his left hand, Lieutenant Achison angrily pushed the transport through the doorway with the other. Jusan still held the flask in his hand. It was empty.

"Here, guard—overseer—double-iron this man. And, Mr. Higgs, produce him for punishment after breakfast."

The whole Stockade understood. Jusan had

drunk the Lieutenant's spirits. That was why he was so prompt in obeying the Officer's instruction.

"Achison might ha' known it!" said Higgs to Dent later. "Put liquor into a pris'ner's grasp!—why, in Major Lockyer's time he'd ha' been cashiered for the same. I don't blame Jusan!"

* * * *

And Tinsley, what of him? He was getting away safely over the gorges and valleys.

It is doubtful whether the spirit would have done more than impart a spasmodic vitality to the boy's debilitated constitution, or whether it would have kept him an hour longer from his grave in the head of the Grose valley. The Lieutenant, in after days, used to solace himself with that thought. Within a few moments of the officer's return to the lad's side, he watched the last tremor shake the recumbent form, and knew that over the Valley of the Shadow, gloomier than any that hemmed in the site of the Stockade with their fathomless sombreness, the convict's soul was speeding to the sphere of a very different Régime.

It was not the first convict-death by many that Achison had witnessed, but none had

touched him so deeply, for in no other case had he witnessed the gradual decay of all that was physically and morally worth preserving in a convict's nature.

He had stood by while, on Pulpit Hill, they had stopped a caravan, and had taken from a shelf a canvas-clad transport who craved to die in the sunlight. He had sighed over the man who had invoked his mercy to convey a message to his father. "The Rev. —— ——, M.A., Rector of ——; I am his son!"

He had stood by when another "gentleman" had taken his leave of life in this very Stockade —a gentleman who "threw back" to the gentlehood which he had bartered for the husks of the penal styes, in the last moments which the System granted him, and who had entreated the Lieutenant to transmit a tender, last letter to a lonely manor-house in sleepy Dorset. "It'll be my last lie to my wife!" the Condemned had said. "I've told her many; and none to save her pain—only this. Let her think, Lieutenant, I died—I died—not as I die!"

Those deaths had touched him somewhat, because they were men of his class. This one of Convict James Tinsley, *alias* Luffy Ned, *alias* "Mary Jane," touched him more deeply still.

He had liked the boy for his own sake since he had been mustered into the gang at Penrith. Then the lad was round-faced, merry, laughter-loving. Coming under sentence from Hobart Town, for horse-stealing—a boyish freak—he was too young to realize all the infamies of the Régime and the System. Knowing what he (Achison) knew of the caravans in which it was customary to lodge the members of the road-gangs, he shuddered that day of the first muster at the prospect before the bright boy once he was "van'd." Had he had power, he would have prevented the lad going into the itinerating "hell." He had no power, although he was in command of the gang. The Regulations were peremptory on the point of showing favouritism to a transport. A harder man would have been less conscientious in his obedience to the Rules. Achison obeyed them—and James Tinsley, aged 17, went into the caravan on that first night at Emu Plains with only one *alias*. When he came out the next morning with an ineffaceable terror drawing out the plumpness from his cheeks, he owned a second —"Mary Jane."

From that hour the lad deteriorated. Achison, when he could, saved him from awful com-

panionship in the day; from that of the night there was no saving him—the Regulations were peremptory. He was too young for a billet, even if the Regulations had permitted the Lieutenant to appoint so recent a convict when there were nominal "good-conduct" men of longer alliance with the Régime hungry for such. But the Regulations, through which an indurated, unscrupulous officer could have driven a chain-gang and a dozen caravans, were to Achison, holding an exaggerated sense of his duty, binding and ineradicable.

All that he could do for the lad was, when, on Sundays, he made short trips of exploration into the valleys and gorges of the wondrous mountain region, to take him in his company to carry a rope and lunch-bag. In these trips he had, in such talk as could pass between a military officer and a convict boy, urged Jimmy to "keep off the cross." Consistently with his allegiance to the Establishment he could not denounce the Regulations to the lad; but by precept and by example he strove to revive in Tinsley's heart those qualities of hopefulness and self-respect which, once crushed beyond recovery, the convict became fit for the Inferno. Nine months at Pulpit Hill and the Stockade

had instilled a precocious bravado into Jimmy; but, Sunday after Sunday, as the Lieutenant took him out in the ranges, Achison gained courage as he thought he discerned a softening of the soul so early encrusted with the vices of the System. And now—and now—the boy was dead!

* * * *

As he stood over the stiffening corpse, he recalled a conversation which had taken place between himself and the boy as they stood, eight or nine Sundays back, on the brink of the precipice which was to be known by-and-by as Govett's Leap.

"Don't, sir—don't, Mr. Achison!" Tinsley had cried. "Don't go so close—ye may get giddy, sir." Achison had swung himself out on a rocky ledge to view to more advantage the fall (the "Leap" proper), with which the wind was sporting, now dashing it in mist against the rock, and now puffing it magically into filmy lace, and the youth, noting the precariousness of the officer's position, could not refrain from an alarmed shout.

"Tush, lad, tush! I'm safe enough! I think I'll try to reach that talus. The view from there should be very fine."

"The what, sir?"

"That jutting point of rock below. Sling the rope, Jim—I'll get you to lower me down part of the way. Take it round that tree there."

"Oh, Lieutenant, don't go. I ain't strong, you know——"

"The rope'll help me down forty feet or so, and there seems to be a ledge there, and hauled round the tree it'll be safe enough."

"Leave it to next week, sir—please do! You can have 'nother man here then."

"What are you afraid of, Tinsley? For me?"

"For you, sir—an' myself, sir, too. S'pose I let you drop, they'd say I'd—I'd murdered you!"

The youth spoke with an earnestness that was not affected, and Achison, knowing well that the descent of the precipitous wall was really a dangerous task, consented to postpone his attempt till more help was at hand.

"All right, I won't go down to-day. But suppose I did drop, Jim; one couldn't die in a grander place, could he?"

The boy didn't speak, but gazed long over the awe-inspiring ravine, with its floor of hills and forests, its formless void, its imprisoned

immensity. Then something of the mysterious influence of the scene—one of those terror-tipped shafts forged in the arsenal of awe-inspiring Nature which penetrate to the brain of the unreasoning and the rude—forced him into dumb tears.

"Why, Tinsley, why, lad, what's this? Come, come, no whimpering—be a man!"

The convict-boy threw himself on a slab of rock.

"I can't help it, sir! It makes me think—I—shall—never see—mother—again."

The officer put out his hand and touched the boy's shoulder; other reply he could not find. Nor did he speak again till the lad had moaned another confidence into his ear.

He was looking with his damp eyes to the sky, which seemed to have borrowed a deeper tint of blue from the violets and purples which nestled between the ranges.

"If I die, Lieutenant, sir, in the roader, don't bury me! Throw me over here or somewhere like this."

"Die!—what's put that in your head, Jim?"

The officer tried to laugh.

"Will ye promise, sir? Do, sir!—in a grave, sir—oh, it'll be too much like my plank in the

van. The old men say the grave means freedom, sir. When I'm free I want to forget the hell-on-wheels—I want to forget it when I'm dead!"

"Hold your tongue, Jim; you don't know what you're saying!"

"I beg pardon, sir, I do! If I'm cooped up when I'm—free—I'll think I'm in the van again, sir. But to lie at the bottom of the gully, sir—to draw a breath an' to know I'm not robbin' no one else—to look up an' know heaven's above, an' not the roof of a hell-on-wheels—oh, that'll be grand! Promise, sir, will you? You've been so good to me—oh, promise!"

Blaming himself for his foolishness in acceding to the boy's silly fancy, Achison had consented.

* * * *

That had been eight, nine Sundays ago.

And now, on this Sunday, Achison recollected.

And when, after breakfast and prayers, and that other devotional rite, the reading of the Regulations, and that further sacred ceremony, the flogging for theft of Convict Jusan, Senior-Overseer Higgs presented the five men who had enjoyed their little joke at his expense for

inquiry and punishment; and when the Lieutenant-in-Command had found them guilty—what other could he do, the evidence and the Regulations being respected?—he ordered the five a most unusual punishment.

Which was to carry, sewn in a blanket, the dead body of James Tinsley, No. 14 (Colonial-convict), per *Vansittart*, to the head of the gorge.

It was a punishment the severity of which was not in accordance with Mr. Higgs' notions—nor, possibly, with the Lieutenant's own, for had the offenders spoken earlier, the boy's life might have been saved. Still, it was not a light task to bear the corpse through two miles of dense scrub, and to bear it reverently. For he took care they should not hustle it. Though the Régime had killed Tinsley, it should show him some respect at the last.

They lowered it down by a hundred feet of rope to a spot midway, so it seemed from above, to the bed of the gorge. On a rocky fragment it rested. Achison read a psalm over it.

Three years afterwards he (now Captain) stood, with Assistant-Surveyor W. R. Govett, by the foot of the Fall, and as he told in part

the story we now narrate, he looked up—up hundreds of feet—and saw a bunchy protuberance between a chrome-coloured rock and the blue heavens.

"That's the spot!" he pointed as he spoke; "see, I take it the ferns have wound their fronds round it. Nature can be kindlier than——"

"The System? Yes!"

* * * *

Achison established a precedent that Sunday, which certain old members of the Blackheath Stockade remembered when they desired to bury Senior-Overseer Higgs—alive.

BOB WARPHY'S KINDLY DEED

THE low, black hull of the *Meander*, prison-hulk, Woolwich, was, on a September evening in 183—, bustling with life and ringing with sound. She was an inert and silent mass an hour ago; now she was vivid with motion and noise. For within the hour she had received into her 'tween decks and the barred recesses of her hold 120 ironed convicts. From the metropolis about 80 had come, and by a coincidence there had arrived at the same moment a couple of consignments of like sin and misery from the rural districts. The summer Assizes and the Old Bailey Sessions were working harmoniously together in the good work of freeing Merrie England from the rabbit-poachers, the turnip-stealers, the pocket-handkerchief-"nippers," and similar hardened ruffians; and between them those justly lauded Institutions of British Law had succeeded in cageing, at the rate of two a

minute, six-score of the said ruffians on the *Meander* hulk as a preliminary to despatching them to Port Jackson.

One of the coasting contingent is a short, sickly-looking fellow of 35 or 36 years of age. There is a week's growth of brownish hairiness on his pallid cheeks and chin; his linen, or the fragment of it visible, is encrusted with dirt, and in that respect resembles his hands, which are manacled—one to a chain, and the other to a brother-convict's handcuff. Still, unkempt and unshaved as he is, he looks what in the cant of the Hulk Reports is termed "Superior." And the man who could look "superior" after a seven-days' tramp on the chain from an assize-town to the shipment port would easily pass for a gentleman when attired in clean clothes of a respectable cut, and freed from disgraceful surroundings. Seven days in a transport-gang would have made the First Gentleman in Europe look like a costermongering cad, and there is some excuse, therefore, for the failure of Mrs. John Griffiths to identify her gentlemanly-looking husband with the sickly and disreputable convict to whom reference has been made.

It is between-decks. Hustled up the gangway, hustled down the hatchway, the chained

and manacled group, eighteen or nineteen strong, to which the sickly creature is literally attached, has flung itself down in a tired, reckless, and despairing heap to wait its turn at the anvil-block where the "land"-irons are to be unriveted and ship-irons put on. And the woman Griffiths, pretty and well-formed, with the wholesome aspect of the countryside lingering about her, though the strain of a great anguish is burdening her as palpably as does the child she carries in her arms, passes by not perceiving that her husband is among the huddled wretches.

"I don't—see—him!" she gasped, with a toneless hoarseness, to the constable who was guiding her in the semi-darkness.

The constable had been aggravated by the sudden inrush of prisoners. The old black hulk had been empty of an infamous cargo this month past, and here all at once, just the day, too, that he had arranged to enjoy a long-shore outing, she had filled up! No wonder he was irascible and out of temper. British Law expected him to be vigilant and punctual for the sum of one pound three and fourpence weekly stipend, but there was no condition in the bond as to humaneness or kindliness of temper. He snorted in reply: "Then, you jade, 'ow the devil can I see

'im if you can't? An' 'ow can I waste my time 'ere on ye a-lookin' for 'im unless you pay me?"

"I haven't anything, sir—at least, sir, not much——"

"You've got 'nuft to buy your dicky-man sum'at, I know, an' you'll have to fin' me sum'at, too, or off you go! I ain't no time to waste a-lookin' for hussies' men!"

Trembling, the girl changed the arm on which the child, a bonnie boy of two years, slumbered, and tremblingly drew from her pocket a netted purse. She was extracting one of the paltry store of seven-shilling pieces which it contained when there was a sudden movement among some of the London portion of the newly-arrived cargo, and, in a moment, the purse had been snatched from her hand. The thief flung himself back into his gang—and a jeer of derision signalled that the act had been perceived by others and was applauded.

"My purse, my purse!" shrieked the woman. The cry was unavailing; the constable, additionally angered by the loss of the anticipated bribe, knew it was useless searching for the offender for the stolen article, and pushed the woman insolently towards the hatchway. "'Ere, get

'way with you. Sarves you right losin' your mopuses, a-takin' up my time to no purpose, an' me so much to do."

The woman turned and prayed to the quarter whence the thief had emerged. "Oh, sir, who took my purse, please give it me! I've nothing to get home with, or to get food for my child!"

The appeal was in vain. Still, it gained the object with which she had visited the hulk. Her voice reached the ears of her husband, over the infernal noises of the place. He was lying on the deck apathetic, craving for the death which would not come, and endeavouring to drown in sleep the consciousness and the remorse which crushed him with a weight more terrible than that of his irons.

"Mary!" he cried. "Mary! Is that you?" He pulled himself up by the chain and a staple in the bulkhead. "Oh, Mary, this is good of you — and what is the matter, dear?" He dragged his share of the chain and the body of his chain-mate with him, towards where she was standing in the half-light of the hatchway. And at his words, the girl, forgetful of her money loss, and mindful only that her husband was there, whom she had never thought to see again, turned to that dear soul and embraced him.

What to her was it that a hundred curious glances were resting upon them—that she could not be clasped in his arms because they were iron-gripped — that every tender word that welled from her clinging lips was overheard by a score of contemptuous ears?

She turned and passed her disengaged arm round his neck. "My John! I've found you at last!" And she fondled him, pressing the little one to his face, murmuring the while soft love-words. But—

"'Ere—time's up! Come along now!" The constable so interfered.

"Oh, sir, leave me just a few minutes longer!"

"None of that, now! I can't leave you—there's others 'sides you want to see their aneas [men], an' I ain't no time, unless you pay me."

The mention of payment recalled to her the loss of her purse. She had nothing beside its contents, and now they were gone! Sixty miles from home, and not a penny to reach home with. God!

But the Lord Commissioners who, at this juncture, had something or other to do with the hulks (what, in the plenitude of their wisdom, was never precisely defined), had made a provision for exigencies of the kind, and if she

couldn't find the wherewithal to remunerate the Lord Commissioners' representative, the constable, to wit, for his loss of time in guarding her—"Can't leave you alone here, missus; you're too purty!" said the leering fellow—well, she would have to go forthwith. And, with scarcely a word of her love spoken, and not a syllable uttered of the trust and faith and hope for the future which she had designed to bestow upon her unhappy husband, she was being torn away, half-fainting, from his side, when the constable remembered her wedding-ring.

"You've a fawney, ain't you?" inquired the constable.

"A what, sir?"

"A fawney—a wedding-ring? Ain't you a honest 'ooman?"

Too sore for indignation, the woman thrust forth her left hand. The thin band of gold rested upon the proper finger.

"Oh, I sees, you're right, missus! Well, jest you give me that, an' I'll let you stay a 'ole hour with your ol' man. 'Tis against rules, you know, but I don't mind jest onst, as you won't see 'im for a long time agen, unless you go out to Botany Bay yourself."

The constable's chuckle was contagious.

Several of the neighbouring prisoners laughed —laughed the more heartily as they saw the officer, the trusted Representative of My Lord Commissioners, attempt to pull the wedding-ring from the woman's finger.

She drew back her hand, affrighted. "Not that!" she said; "here, my shawl! Anything but that!"

"That, or you go on shore this minit! 'Ow d'you think I'm a-goin' to waste my time on you without sum'at? Come, no —— nonsense, or else——"

John Griffiths (real name), convict, under fourteen years' sentence for embezzlement, tried under the style of "John Jasker," was as morally weak as he was physically. Still, there was one virtue in which he was not deficient, and that was the love of his wife. He forgot himself in the moment which succeeded the hulk-warder's words. Linked to the chain on one side, and coupled to his twin-rogue on the other, with irons on his legs, he had but one weapon of offence—his head. He propelled it forward, and caught the constable sharply under the chin, thereby achieving two things—the downfall of the officer, and a very bad "hulk report" for himself.

And the last look that John Jasker, otherwise Griffiths, had of his young wife and child, before he left for the New Britannia of a Southern World, was as she was hauled rudely up the temporary ladder to the upper deck.

She tarried as the constable pulled her to the foot of the hatch, and cast a look of tearful affection to where her husband had stood. It flashed through the inner gloom to the bulkhead like a lightning streak into the core of thunderous mountain gorges. Her husband saw her action and heard her words, though she could not see him.

"I'll never let it go, John, never!—not if I'm starving! When I can't wear it, John, I'll not be—be an honest woman!" As she spoke, she flung out her left hand so that her wedding-ring was visible.

* * * *

In a month's time John Jasker was on board the *Ocean* transport-ship, and sailing away from Woolwich to Botany Bay. With him went that hulk-report: "A dangerous character."

The hulk-report was as simple a device as was ever invented for driving a man, and a woman too, completely and entirely to the devil. If in

one of the hulks controlled by My Lords the Commissioners, "a system of extortion and petty tyranny went on by which the hulk-constables oppressed the convicts waiting transport," My Lords the Commissioners were happy to inform the Majesty of Parliament "that their Lordships were in ignorance of the facts." Which was not at all a surprising thing, if their Lordships would only have understood so. It would, under the circumstances, have been rather surprising if they had known anything of the matter. Notwithstanding, a system of extortion and petty tyranny did exist, one consequence being that a man or a woman who resented the latter and had not the means to satisfy the former generally earned a vile "report." In the magnanimity of the Law, no record of a transport's crime and conviction was "sent out" with him. That was to give him a chance in the new world. But what never failed to go with him, once he passed outwards over the hulk gangway, was a "report." And woe betide him if when a tenant of a hulk-plank he had shown an independence of spirit or a complete emptiness of purse!

"Constable," asked the Hulks Superintendent as he was compiling reports a day or two before

the *Ocean* dropped alongside to take in her cargo. "John Jasker, No. 7 mess?"

"A werry bad 'un, your Honour—werry vi'lent an' insubordinet, sir. Saluted me onct, your Honour 'll remember—dark cell seven days."

"Yes, I remember. That'll do. Next!" And while the constable was recalling the "next's" conduct, the Hulks Superintendent penned three words against John Jasker's name: "A dangerous character."

Such was the routine for which My Lords were responsible, but of which they were in refreshing ignorance.

* * * *

It clung to Jasker always, did that report. It won him classification during the daily exercise hour with a crew of villains which included at least two murderers and a resurrectionist. It procured for him the privilege of specially weighted irons, and the scarcely more desirable enjoyment of peculiar exhortations from the religiously disposed Surgeon-Superintendent. And it docked his water allowance by a quantity equal to one pint per week.

It clung to him on arrival at Port Jackson. He was sullen and desperate when the clerks

from the Principal Superintendent's Office came down to check off the manifest and to ascertain the particulars of the convicts. The Surgeon-Superintendent could supply them with no further details respecting each man than were endorsed in his hulk-report, except such additional character as the transport had gained for good or ill during the voyage. In Jasker's case this latter record was simply: "Bad."

With a "dangerous" hulk-report, and a "bad" ship-report, and a lowering sullenness of the features when the clerks addressed him, it was only to be expected that these gentlemen were prejudiced against him, and that on their report he was not put down for assignment, but was merely ordered into the gaol-gang.

* * * *

He was still in the gaol-gang when, four years later, his wife with her boy, now a sturdy youngster of nearly seven, arrived in Old Sydney. By infinite pains and by surpassing economies, the woman, moved by that intensity of unselfish devotion which inspires so many of her sex to heroic exertions for what in the world's sight is a trivial object, had earned and saved money enough to procure her and her child's passage to Australia. She had expected

to have found her husband free. In the one letter which he had sent home, he had told her he was in a fair way to obtain his liberty as a ticket-of-leave, and was not very uncomfortable. His statement was a lie, but its motive was to ease her anxiety on his account, and hence we may not condemn it. But when she arrived and found that he was still in the gaol-gang, condemned thereto by sentence after sentence for insubordination and insolence, as sundry scowlings and shruggings of shoulders were so called, it was a shock to her. All the greater, of course, that she had looked to receive a free or partially free man's welcome. Permitted to speak to him once, he informed her that unless by influence of a more or less honourable kind she could obtain a pardon for him, he would have to serve another five years for his "ticket." That had been the effect of his later sentences—and of the hulk-report.

It was his hulk-report always. "What is the pris'ner's police-report?" a magistrate would ask as Jasker was presented before him. "Bad, y'r worship!" the prosecuting officer would reply. And then would he begin the repetition of Jasker's offences from his endorsed parchment, with the hulk-report always heading the

list. A "good" hulk-report counted for little with any magistrate; a bad one for much, whether or not it was confirmed by subsequent conduct. And Jasker's later conduct had been marked by repeated acts of insolence and so forth. A "bad hulk" stamped the whole after-prison career of nine out of ten convicts who were unfortunate enough to earn it. In Jasker's case it had prevented his assignment and postponed the issue of his ticket. The greed and malice of an illiterate hulk-constable had ruined the transport's nature. It would have been a tragic if it had not been so commonplace an incident of the System.

With her husband powerless to aid her, with a growing boy hungry for food, what was Mrs. Jasker or Griffiths to do? Free from the tie of the lad, she could have earned a living for herself, but the necessity of caring for the boy handicapped her. Free seamstress' work, with so many convict women available, was naturally ill-paid; and many a week, after the cost of her material and the rent of her poor room were defrayed from her earnings, the remainder barely sufficed to find food for the boy, let alone for herself. At last some one of her few employers suggested she should apply for her

husband's assignment to herself, and promised to back up her application. It was refused by the Board of Assignments; "applicant had apparently no means of supporting the prisoner applied for"; and besides, "the prisoner applied for is of very bad character, his police report being notoriously bad, and it is essential to his reformation and the protection of the community that he should be kept under strict supervision in the gaol-gang." That settled it for a time.

Then she got a hint from a junior in the Board's office that if she could find £10 to fee himself and one Timothy Pounce, the matter of the assignment could be arranged. They would make the terms very easy—would only ask for half the sum down and the balance in six months after her husband's assignment. Pounce, for his half of the money, would forge an application from a (fictitious) inland settler, and he himself would put the necessary papers through the Principal Superintendent's office and the Board's office. Mary Jasker, however, could not raise ten shillings, let alone ten pounds, and the liberal offer of the Board's Junior Clerk was reluctantly refused.

She was at her wits'-end when Mr. Robert

Warphy introduced himself to her. Mr. Warphy —albeit he was a Treasury official—was not above doing a kindly deed, and being by chance present one day in the Principal Superintendent's office when she had called to importune that high authority to grant her husband's services to save her and her boy from starving, he had been interested by her manners and her still pretty face. "Who's that woman?" he had asked of a Principal Superintendent's clerk.

"She wants to get her husband assigned to her."

"Are you going to grant him?"

"No—there's an objection: she can't support him——"

"S'pose not. What should a woman like her want her man assigned for except to support her?"

"Well, that's not all. The pris'ner's of bad record. Very bad hulk-report, and a dozen or so insubordination convictions."

"Oh, that's it, is it! Well, she's still a pretty piece of goods, and it might be worth while helping her."

"You're too good, Warphy, you are!" laughed the other. "You want another *chère amie* so soon? Why, it's only a couple of months since

you got the Lynn woman her husband's freedom, isn't it?"

"Yes, —— her and him. I caught a Tartar in each of them; but this little woman's different, I'll wager. She'll keep open house for me for longer than a couple of months if I do anything for her."

From which observations may be inferred the nature of Mr. Robert Warphy's kindly intentions.

* * * *

He called on Mrs. Jasker, otherwise Griffiths, at her miserable lodgings in Kent Street.

"You are Mrs. Jasker, ma'am?" He bowed courteously, for he was the very pink of affability, was Bob Warphy, of the Treasury.

She curtsied assent, as she, dropping her sewing, prepared a chair for her visitor.

"And you wish, I'm told, to get your husband assigned to you—he's in the gaol-gang now."

"Oh, sir, I do! I can't make a living for myself and my boy, sir, unless"——She stopped, the tremors of her starved frame revealing at once her weakness and the excitement of the hope which had already leapt up within her, for she felt that this gentleman's call meant that something would be done.

"Unless he is freed?"

"Yes, sir, that is it. Oh, sir, will you get his pardon or a ticket for him? If you only knew how we—that is, my little boy, sir, suffers from want of food and clothes!"

"I can understand!" he said sympathetically, but never swerving one jot's-breadth from his purpose. The Satyr is always relentless. "Well, I think I can get him his pardon—or, at least, his assignment to you."

"Oh, sir—God bless you! sir." She broke into a rush of tears. "Oh, sir, how can I thank you?"

"Oh, well, you know," he said, "these little services are always paid for by an equivalent!"

"Pay—equivalent!" She repeated the words aimlessly. How could she pay aught? And the tears came again, this time the acrid drops of disappointment.

"Oh, yes—you know it's always done when a woman wants her husband's freedom. Why, I've had three women when it was only a case of tickets, not of pardon; but seeing as it is for you, dear—and that you're young and pretty"—he stooped to kiss her—"I'll get him his pardon."

Till this moment, his meaning was not clear

to her. Now there could be no mistaking it. She pushed him away with her utmost strength, and threw at him a glance in which there was hatred of the suggestion and scorn of the man who uttered it.

"I thought you were—a gentleman!" With her thin hands beating down the tumult in her breast, she forced herself to speak. "You take —advantage—of my cruel necessity—of my starving child!"

"Eh? nothing of the sort! It's purely a matter of bus'ness—done every day here—quite the regular thing! You want your husband and I want—well—you!"

"Sir, my husband shall die in chains first, and my boy and I in the gutter. Go, sir, go!"

"Oh, well, if you think better of my proposal, you can always hear of me at the Treasury—Warphy's my name—Mr. Robert W-ar-phy!" He turned to go, but paused on the threshold to say one parting word.

"And, look here—I'll oppose any assignment and any pardon—application for which doesn't pass through my hands!"

"I shall go to the Governor, sir——"

"Do, my good woman, and tell him what I've said. Do you think he'll believe you—you, a

transport's wife? Take care he doesn't imprison you for blackmailing and slandering an officer of the Government. That's my advice, and good day!"

That was his advice—the advice of a thoroughly experienced man of the Old Sydney world. And she knew enough of Old Sydney to act upon it.

* * * *

With breaking heart she struggled on for a few weeks longer, when her boy cried for food. Then, one day, taking her boy for a walk in the Racecourse, from whence they passed by the, as yet, roofless walls of St. Mary's Chapel to the Domain, she saw her husband in the chain-gang working by the Wooloomooloo embankment.

She drew as near as she could to him for fear of the guards—to speak to the men of the iron-gangs was a misdemeanour punishable by imprisonment—and, scourging herself into unnatural calmness, asked how he did.

In a brief whisper, that seemed, so acute was its pain, to have sucked its bitterness from his entrails, he begged her to get him "out of that." "I shall die else—get me free—anyhow!"

Stunned, she had but one thought. That her husband had learnt of the ways in which Free-

dom could be bought and sold, and that he wished her to tread that path of humiliation and sorrow. "How could he!" she thought. "If I had been he, I'd have died first!" But Jasker did not know; his appeal had been simply wrung from him by the utter misery of his condition.

From the Domain she went to the Treasury and asked for Mr. Robert Warphy. She was shown into his room.

"If you will gain my husband's pardon, sir—when you will!" She looked into his face unblushingly. It was not for her to blush, she thought. If the transaction was nefarious, it was still a business one according to Old Sydney notions, and she at least considered she was free of its infamy.

* * * *

There was this much to be said for Warphy. He was a man of his word. Other men of the System had entered into similar bargains, and they had not invariably carried out their part of the contract. Very religiously Warphy, however, did. Within a few days, John Jasker, per *Ocean*, received a conditional pardon. Warphy did not do things by halves.

On the night of his release, Jasker sat in his

wife's little room, and moaned out to her his thankfulness that she had succeeded in winning his pardon.

"But you have not told me, Mary, how you managed it! You had no money, I know!"

For answer, she lifted her left hand to the line of his vision. He looked up wonderingly, for he did not guess her meaning. She had to make it plainer.

"Do you not remember, John, my last words on board the hulk?"

"That I do, wife! They've saved me many a time from despair, and all that despair means in the gangs."

"I said that I'd never take my ring off so long as I was an honest woman!"

"You did!" And he looked at the hand again—and saw the ring was not on it!

She passed to the mantel, and taking a tiny packet wrapped in paper from it, unfolded the sheet, and held out to him her wedding-ring.

Then he understood; and insisted upon the whole story being told him.

* * * *

On the next day he earned ten shillings, and on the next day but one he went into Simpson's hardware stores, opposite the old

gaol in Lower George Street and bought a horsewhip.

The Treasury was in George Street also. Thither from the store he passed, but Mr. Warphy was out—had gone to the Club in Bent Street. Thither then he went.

And on the steps of the Club-house he saw a number of gentlemen standing.

* * * *

He went up and saluted them. One and all stared at his effrontery, for "Lag" was written, if not on his face, at least in the dragging of his left leg. They were amazed to the degree of wrathfulness, as, not content with saluting, he addressed them:—

"May I ask if either of you gentlemen is Mr. Robert Warphy?"

"Ha! ha! Mr. Warphy," condescended to jocularly remark His Excellency General Ralph Darling. "This the usual stamp of your Club-callers?"

"He! he!—not quite, your Excellency," responded Warphy, annoyed. "If you want to see me, my man, you had better call at the Treasury!"

"This is a better place than the Treasury, your Honour. You did me a kindness, Mr.

Warphy, or rather, my wife one—and a kindness done to my wife is one to me."

"Tush! my man, I don't know you, and if I did your wife a kindness, it is—he! he!—I trust what I'm ready to do to any one."

"But, sir, this kindness is an exceptional one—and should receive exceptional thanks. And, sir, this is how I thank and repay you!"

Uttering the last words, Jasker stepped forward and, with the whip, struck Warphy sharply across the face, and as sharply repeated the blow before the bystanders could arrest his arm.

"That's how I repay the kindness of the man who obtained my freedom in exchange for the debauching of my wife!"

* * * *

At Charlotte Place Police Court within an hour he was arraigned, and his police record—including the hulk-report—having been produced in evidence of his desperate character, he was ordered 300 lashes. At the seventeenth stroke the weakliness of his nature mastered his resolution. He died.

THE LIBERATION OF THE FIRST THREE

"BELOW there!"

The words of the call beat against the walls of the shaft, were thrust (so it seemed) from side to side, and throbbed into silence in the darkness at its bottom. There was no echo, but up the sixty feet of timbered opening rang instantly metallic sounds, and then, a moment later, an answering shout :—

"Yes, sir! Here, sir!"

"Show yourselves!"

The speaker bent over the platform and peered down.

"One, two—three, four—five, six!" he counted. "Right! Any complaints?"

"No, sir!" came up.

"Good-night! And, Page, the grating?"

Lieut. Cooke, in command of the Port Arthur Coal Mines Depôt, with its gang of to-be-peculiarly-punished convicts, so ordered; and

Lieut. Cooke's myrmidons in present attendance thrust upon the mouth of the pit the iron grating which saved His Majesty the cost of a night sentry's services by blocking the egress of the prisoners in No. 3 pit. The men of the Régime trusted few things to chance. The half-dozen men in the galleries were doubly ironed—trebly, if you reckon also the links which bound each to another; they were separated from the surface by sixty feet of ladderless shaft; and yet had there been nothing else to hold them to the spot where the tender mercies of the Local Government had lodged them, the men of the Régime thought the chances were still in favour of their escaping. Whereupon the Régime, being crippled in the strength of its military guard, hit upon the expedient of a grating to take the place of a sentry—a grating with double padlocks, with inch-thick bars forged in the workshops at the Settlement specially under the eye of Commandant Dr. Rossell, and with interstices, perhaps, of two fingers' breadth. If the pit-workers had any chance of escape, that grating removed it. So the Régime thought.

* * * *

Yet so utterly oblivious were those wretches

immured in the galleries of No. 3, "Murderers' Pit"—No. 1 was "Forgers'," and No. 2 was "Gomorrah"—of the views and desires of the Authorities that for some weeks past they had been bent upon escaping. They didn't care a "brass" for the Régime, or for those illustrations of the Régime's loving-kindness—the irons, the ladderless state of the shaft, and the grating. Their difficulty was—food. It was useless attempting to escape without a stock of food, sufficient to last them for three weeks or a month. And the supreme problem of existence to them resolved itself into the question how they were to steal the rations.

There were six of them, only a moiety of them murderers. And those who had not murdered were particularly unwilling to face the grim recesses of the scrub which surrounded the "coal-mines" without an ample supply of rations. Macquarie Harbour had been broken up a year or so, and the murderous moiety were part of the lot from Hell's Gates. That was why the other three were especially disinclined to attempt a bolt without well-filled pockets. Each of the Harbour men was doing a second "life" term for escaping from a Sarah Island gang. Each had bolted, and each had been

recaptured—with a slavering mouth, that symptom of an infamy. The non-murderous Three paled, in the gloom of the galleries, when they learnt, each from his brother-hewer, what had caused the slavering. The *gourmand* is ever smacking his lips over the remembrance of some especially choice *menu*. The Three with the blood-dyed records were *gourmands*.

* * * *

Jones, Tooth, Hardy—these constituted the murderful moiety. Phillips, Bunt, West—these were the three who paled at the recital of the others' banquet. By chains of thirty-six links (say nine feet from the basil of one waist to the waist of the other) was Jones fastened to Phillips, and Tooth to Bunt, and Hardy to West. Until Death or his twin-brethren of the Régime chose to part them were the couples to remain thus embraced.

In this companionship the men walked and slept—"mealed" and "reported" themselves. In this companionship were they to live and die. That was the plain English of the arrangement—of the latest invented detail of Colonel George Arthur's newly established penal settlement.

* * * *

At the mines the denizens of "Murderers'" were known as "The Twins." Each "twin" wore a pair of trousers, a basil or iron waistband, and his double ankle-shackles. Once a month, for two hours, he wore also a shirt, boots, and a cap. It was on Inspection Sunday, when Dr. Rossell came down to the Mines to "report on the well-being of the transports and other convicts," that this additional clothing was issued. One other daily prerogative was to every man the half of the nine-foot chain before mentioned.

Their heavy and airy costume offered little or no impediment to the workers turning out daily (Sundays excepted) their allotted tasks. The hewing of fifteen hundredweight, such "hundred" consisting of 120 lbs.—not more than three out of the fifteen were to be composed of slack and small coal—made up, with the haulage to the shaft, the cutting of galleries and the picking out of pillars, the daily quota of each man. Not very difficult work, if it had not been for the circumstances that only for two hours per month did the ganger draw a breath of air which was uncontaminated with coal-dust, and that the daily ration-scale permitted him only 16 ozs. uncooked maize-meal,

12 ozs. of meat with bone, 1 oz. of salt, ½ oz. of soap, and unlimited water. But these circumstances were not calculated to strengthen the physical stamina, and even with the aid of the allowance of candles (four per man per week, which were as often as not treated as adjuncts to the larder) the task sometimes proved beyond their strength to perform.

With the reminiscence of the Harbour banquets constantly before them, the Three with the Stained Records grew hungry and went weaker to their work, and failed to perform it, and, to save themselves from being flogged on Inspection Sundays, confiscated pretty frequently the fruits of their chain-mates' toil.

Phillips was lugging his basket one evening to the end of the gallery to have it hoisted to the pit-mouth, when Jones, necessarily going with him because of their mutual chain, insinuated that he would be obliged by Phillips handing him half a basketful.

"Only 'arf, Ben! I'll giv' it yer back sum' time."

"No!" said Phillips resolutely. "You owe me two baskets now. And being short last inspection got me a dozen."

"Yer won't, won't yer! Yer won't give me 'arf?"

"No!"

"Then I'll take all!"

And, being a man of his word, he did. In the Overman Page's tally-book that night Jones was credited with two baskets; Phillips with two-thirds of one—and that "small."

"Look 'ere, No. 4"—Phillips was "4"—shouted the Overman. "Short agen! Lor', yer'll 'av er devil of er lot ter make up by Sunday week. An' if yer don't, it'll be two dozen next time, mark my words! Com'dant won't stand no nonsense!"

The process of confiscation went on pretty frequently and almost regularly, and regularity also was conspicuous in the matter of the floggings received by Phillips, Bunt, and West. The Lieutenant and the Overman wondered how it was that the three desperate Harbour men never failed to produce their tally of work, while the others, of better reputation, were nearly always "short." For, of course, the story of the confiscations could not be told. The Three would have made dreadfully short work of the man who informed against their tyranny.

It was the victims of the confiscation policy who first pronounced for a "bolt." They had got tired of the treatment to which they were subjected by their chain-mates and the authorities combined; and, as the period of their confinement lengthened, their bodily weakness would increase, though the labour and the punishments would grow heavier. *If* they could only escape!

* * * *

One day, Phillips was "outsider" on his chain. That is to say, he was working nearest the shaft in a gallery. His chain-mate, Jones, had been slumbering the length of the chain away. In the movement of his arms as, lying on his side, he wielded the short pick, Phillips could not avoid jerking the links, and consequently Mr. Jones' repose had been disturbed. He had remonstrated with a lump of coal and an oath, and it was under the influence of the pain excited by the former striking him on the face that Phillips, in a hoarse whisper, said: "God! that I could bolt from this slavery!"

West was outsider in the adjacent gallery, his mate, Hardy, like Jones, also preferring to be lazily recumbent. West caught the whisper and echoed it: "I would to God I could!"

When lodging their—and their mates'—baskets in the shaft chamber that night, Bunt was spoken to by Phillips. "Would he make one to bolt!"

"Would I bolt from hell! Try me!"

* * * *

Their unofficial masters, the Three with the Records, discovered, it is impossible to say how, the intention of their three slaves. Perhaps the galleries carried the sound of the whispers; perhaps in the disturbed sleep of one or other the design was revealed. And learning it, the Three adopted the notion. For a couple of days they kept their subservient chain-mates on the inside, while they themselves, meeting at a point to which their respective galleries converged, discussed the possibilities.

"Them 'uns are for a-boltin', are they?" said Jones to Tooth, who was the discoverer of the escaping scheme. "Now, we've got to go with them or we've to die!"

"That's it, sure!" responded Jones. "They ain't no chance of gettin' away unless they kill us, or we go with 'em. An' we've been a-usin' 'em so that it's not in reason they'll want to take us with 'em."

Hardy took up the parable. "O' cos not! 'ow cud they? But our lay'll be to find out all their plans, an' then to blow 'em,[1] if they ain't good 'nuff to foller!"

The three mouths which had known the slavering were very close to one another, and the three heads to which they belonged touched. The three bodies were crouching closely, so that no syllables of the muttered infamies should penetrate to the men at the lower end of the chains.

"Hist!" said Jones. "An' if they're good 'nuff, wot then? We ain't a-goin' to take them along!"

"Yer a —— fool if yer don't, then!" was Hardy's answer. "Wot yer goin' to live on till yer reach the settled disrick?"

The dreadful emphasis of his last phrase invoked the reminiscent delight of his brother *gourmands*. And in the next few moments of fiendish converse they developed their plans. Which, after all, did not include the taking of the Three Without with them.

* * * *

"Wot d'yer say to bolt, boys?" Jones took

[1] "Blow 'em": Disclose them to the authorities.

upon himself to say the same night, as they all drew up to the bottom of the shaft to be mustered. The Lieutenant-in-Command was exact. He mustered nightly. He would stand by the pit-mouth, and, looking downwards, could tell, in the light of the candles held by each prisoner, their several heads. "Wot d'yer say?"

Phillips, Bunt, and West sent at each other accusatory glances. Who had told their oppressors? Or had it been simply a coincidence that the other three had framed a similar plan? Usually suspicious, and not knowing how much the others knew or guessed, each of the non-murderous fellows mumbled that "he would make one to go."

"Then arter muster we'll talk!" And when the officer's "Good-night" had hailed them all derisively, and the overseer had clanged down the grating which shut them all into their living tomb, and they had put out their candles to save a portion of the dip—ten to the pound—for eating, the Three with the Records took the Three Without into that part of their confidence which they thought fit to share. It wasn't much; nor was it even the material part.

"We're goin' to bolt, boys, an' if as yer likes yer can jine us. An' it's death to every one as blows!"

The Three who were undergraduates muttered assent to the spokesman of the Three graduates.

"An' if yer jine us, we'll do our full tally till we make the bolt. Yer won't ha' to do any o' our work!"

The undergraduates' assent was not needed to this. Had it been expected, they were too surprised to express it.

"We've been a bit 'ard, p'r'aps, but yer'd ha' been just th' same if yer'd had th' upper 'and. An' if yer agrees to go, we'll let bygones be bygones, an' share an' share alike." The magnanimity of the scoundrels!

Jones went on: "An' our noshun is to save each o' us an 'arf rashun a day for a fortnight. It'll be 'ard jonnicks to do our tally on short 'lowunce, but it's our only chance. Then we've som'at to start on. We'll 'av a candle or two 's well apiece, an' wi' th' lot we orter manage ten days or a fortnight outside."

He paused. The graduates listened eagerly for sound of dissent. None came. Had the juniors fallen into the trap? Would they do

full work on half rations so as to accumulate a store of food? Bunt said, "Go on!"

"Once out, we'll make for Pirates' Bay. I've 'erd on a cave wot's there w'ere there's a bed o' shell-fish. An' we can lay by for a time. But th' trouble is—to get out!"

That was the trouble. The problem made each of them breathe hardly. The freeing themselves from irons was comparatively easy, but the scaling of the sixty feet of shaft, and then—the grating! The silence was unbroken for a full minute, save for their laboured inspirations. Then Bunt spoke, hesitatingly. He did not know how much the Three seniors had learnt from Phillips and West, and he thought that if they were aware of what he had in his possession, it would still be to his advantage with them to deal frankly, and to appear as though he fully trusted them. If they did not know, surely they would appreciate highly the generosity of his announcement.

"Well—ye must know, Mr. Jones, as I've a—a—watch-nick."

The Three With leapt, or tried to leap, to their feet. A watch-nick! The gods were good!

"Ye're a brick, Bunt!" shouted Jones, while

Tooth and Hardy made use of similar highly complimentary remarks. "W'ere did yer get it? An' let's see it! Strike a light, Hardy."

The flint and steel permitted them by the graciousness of Lieutenant Cooke emitted a faint spark, and, in a moment, a dip's flame lessened the shadows in the anxious faces. Bunt held in his hand a delicate watch-spring saw. The Three With shouted again and again, for Bunt grasped between his fingers—Freedom, if not for himself, for them.

"Ye're a clever 'un, Bunt!" said Tooth, thinking that perhaps, after all, they had better exempt Bunt from the principal feature of their plan—a man so ingenious as to keep a watch-nick from the knowledge of the authorities, notwithstanding repeated searchings, was good enough to make one of the party. "'Owever did yer manage it?"

Bunt was silent. He was affrighted, for he had seen, by the candle-gleam, in Phillips' eyes and those of West emphatic condemnation of his folly in revealing his possession of the precious thing to the murderers.

"I've—had it a long time," he at last stammered when Jones repeated Tooth's question.

"An' never told us! That warn't fair, Bunty.

Yer sh'u'd ha' been friendly, Bunty—an' yer'd ha' saved yerself a lot. Eny one who's got a watch-nick's got to be treated kind. An' I tell yer wot we'll do, boys. Jest 'cos Bunt's puttin' us under the favour o' lettin' us a-use his nick, we'll help 'un all we can with his tally. That's fair, ain't it, boys!"

The five agreed. And then, at Jones' suggestion, or rather command, for none disputed his assumption of the leadership, they took the Convict Oath. They chanted the eight verses, which began :—

"Hand to hand,
On Earth, in Hell,
Sick or Well,
On Sea, on Land,
On the Square, ever."

And ended—the intervening verses dare not be quoted—

"Stiff or in Breath,
Lag or Free,
You and Me,
In Life, in Death,
On the Cross, never."

They chanted them with crossed and re-crossed hands, and the foot of each pressed to the foot of another. And after the verses, the "loving-cup" of blood. Not a very copious

draught—to provide a hearty drink would have weakened them, and their leader was too much of the general to occasion an unnecessary demand on their strength—only a drop or two from each man's open vein, sucked by every other man. So was fealty to their leader, honour to one another, plighted. The Convict Oath was a terrible thing; it was never broken, without occasioning death to some one — not necessarily to the violator. 'John Price died in 1857 because of a Convict Oath registered at Norfolk Island in the Forties.

* * * *

It was a terrible thing, that Oath. So the undergraduates, at least, thought it; and though they had distrust and hate of the graduates in their hearts, they were prepared to loyally carry out the compact. They found it the easier to do so because the murderers before them, who had gone through the horrid drill of "starving for a bolt," helped them in every way.

The Three With not only did not exact from the Three Without any contribution of coal, but actually helped them. Jones filled two-thirds of Phillips' basket one day in addition to his own; and Tooth ran the risk of a flogging on Inspection Sunday because he kept Bunt's creel

supplied. When half-way on the starving time, Bunt "jacked-up" on half-rations, and fell ill for a couple of days. "No, Bunty, my man, you mustn't take more meal—it'll do you harm now. Stick to the half, and ye'll be used to it in another day or two. Meantime, I'll do your tally."

Then the Three With put up the others to all the dodges as to economising food that they had learnt in the dread school of the Harbour. The graduates completed the knowledge of the undergraduates by showing how the proper sucking of a bone was as good as meat, and how, if an ounce of meat were chewed to a ball, then withdrawn from the mouth, and hardened by exposure to the air, it would appease hunger as effectually as the mastication of the whole ration. They taught the neophytes how to extract the nutriment from soap, and the best way of utilising the candles. "The wick's a meal in itself, Bunty—eat the grease separately," tenderly advised Tooth.

But the main sustenance of the six during the starving time was derived from the subtle elixir of hope.

* * * *

The hour for the attempt was fixed for the

Saturday night midway between two Inspection Sundays.

The Three With wanted it earlier—as early as possible after the next Inspection day. But the Three Without, remembering Macquarie Harbour, said to themselves that they would not then have food enough. So it was fixed for the second Saturday.

The grating was thrown open at five o'clock on week-day mornings, but on Sundays an hour and a half later. That hour and a half would mean a longer start—and a good start was everything in a "bolt."

The first Inspection Sunday after the decision was come to was passed safely. No one "split" or "peached"; all tallies were right except Tooth's. On his score for a month he was five hundredweight short. But he took his "dozen" as mildly as the mother takes the tiny blows of her infant's pulpy fingers. And, when all was said and done, what was twenty-five to Tooth, who left Hell's Gates with two thousand charged against him on the books and impressed on his back?

That Sunday night they began the actual business—the starving was merely a preliminary—of escape. They fractured their irons—ank-

lets, waist-chains and basils. Only the last were sawn through with the watch-nick. When the last girdle was parted, they examined the saw eagerly. It was scarcely blunted!

"To think of a-gettin' off the —— thing so neat!" cried Jones, affected to tears of gratitude.

"Lor'! 'tis much nicer than the col' chisel!"

In the rare cases—one, say, in a hundred—that a girdle or basil once on was taken off, the cold chisel was the cutting instrument. And cold chisels had a nasty habit of slipping and gashing the abdomen.

* * * *

With the release of their bodies from the iron bands it became possible to achieve the next step towards consummating the "bolt."

The walls of the shaft were, as has been indicated, timber-lined. The planks were laid horizontally, and the natural tendency of the Régime to economy would have prompted the Authorities to leave apertures between each plank, thus making two do the work of three, had it not been for the consideration that a foothold would be given to any convict venturing upon the escalade. The timbers were

accordingly laid flush, without—so concluded the Overman after due examination—affording a solitary crevice or a knot which the ingenuity of the prisoners could turn to the least account in mounting. Nevertheless, the six were determined upon ascending.

The chamber at the bottom of the pit, into which the vein-galleries, and the working and air-drives opened, was ten feet deep. That was the first difficulty to surmount.

Three men bunched together, and with hands round each other's necks and bent heads, stood upright.

On their shoulders mounted two. And upon the shoulders of the two the sixth man—Jones—crept up, and wrested from its perpendiculars, two or three feet above the swaying pillar of bestial humanity, a plank. The gap would leave a foothold.

Then he climbed to the gap, and, with labour that shook his frame to a palsy, pulled from its place a second plank. That was the work of the first night.

The next night three more planks were hauled down. The same building up of the tottering, sweating pedestal of flesh, the same wrestling with nails and cleats, the same great

gaspings of pain and relief as the planks were pressed upon, bent and gave way.

The third night, and the fourth night, and the fifth night planks were loosened, taken out, and then replaced loosely. Jones was getting near the pit-mouth now, and was well within the rim of light from the surface. He dare not leave the gaps, for fear they might be observed from above. The Men of the Régime were wont to discourage ingenuity.

From the topmost of the loosened planks, it would be easy to reach the walls at right angles with the side on which the gaps had been made. Then, the last plank so extracted would be used to bridge the angle, and to form a standing-stage for the man who attacked the grating with the watch-nick. And Jones was resolved that that man should be himself. The man who filed away the grating-bars would be first out of the shaft.

All this time the saved rations and candles were accumulating. Heavens! the daily horrors of endurance and the frightful pangs suffered by these men! The conquest over the griping hunger, which might be gratified in a moment if they would—the forcing of the energies to the Titanic task of turning-out the

allotted quantity per day with semi-paralysed limbs and flaccid nerves—the patience, the fortitude, the suffering—would have been heroic in a better cause—nay, were heroic in this very instance. Was not this cause the sacred one of Freedom?

* * * *

"God! I couldn't stand it if it weren't for freedom!" cried Phillips to Jones on the seventh night.

"Yes, 'tis for freedom!" Jones responded, and he coughed loudly, and rang his short pick against the seam.

"I wish I'd that basil on again, I do," said Phillips. "I'd not get hungry so soon. I'll tie something on my stomach—tight."

An answering ring had come from Tooth's gallery, and from Hardy's.

"Don't trouble, Phillips," cried Jones, raising his voice to a shout. "Freedom's come—orl-ready." It was the signal.

The pick crashed into the base of Phillips' skull. The blow was neatly aimed—so well that Phillips did not groan once, nor stirred whence he lay.

Hardy and Tooth were less adept. It took a

second blow from each to finish their respective victims.

Then the Three, who had added another stain to their records, met in the chamber.

"That's th' next part o' our plan well got through," said Jones. "We're gettin' on. We've lib'rated one Three; we're goin' to lib'rate 'nother."

* * * *

That was on the seventh night—a Saturday. The next stage towards freedom was the drawing of the dead men's rations.

Every morning rations were issued for the men mustered overnight. The collective portion for "Murderers'" was sent down in the first baskets in the morning.

The remaining Three had their own half-rations for the starvation time on hand. Also, the like quantity which had been accumulated by the self-denial of the dead men. Still, they had not enough. They wanted more! None of them cared for setting out in company with his brother *gourmands* with only a poor larder.

* * * *

On each of the eighth to the fifteenth nights, inclusive, the dead men were mustered. And

on each successive morning there came down in the first basket the dead men's rations.

Night after night would each of the still imprisoned Three place one of his liberated mates—the one he had himself freed—against the back-wall of the chamber and fix a candle in his hand. And night after night would Lieutenant Cooke look down—audibly count, by the dips' flame, six heads and six hands holding candles—and, having "mustered" them, wish them all "good-night!"

Night after night, till the fifteenth, were the six mustered, and none of them made complaint, and all drew their rations regularly the next day. The dead as well as the quick drew their rations. And the nostrils of the living were filled with the odour of the dead, and they, too, would have died but that they were stayed by the hope of liberty.

And on the fifteenth night the Other Three also won Freedom, in a way to be told.

THE LIBERATION OF THE OTHER THREE

THE morning after the liberation of the first Three of the gang working in "Murderers'" Pit, Port Arthur coal-mines, was joyous above ground. The atmosphere was tinted with a vaporous blue, through which gleamed and shimmered splashes of orient gold. Page, overman, carolled in the lightness of his heart and in the exhilaration of spirits which were born of the splendour of the day, and as he weighed into the baskets the rations for the Six below, he threw in a benison with them. "Poor devils! To think of them being down there on a day like this! God help 'em!"

Yet, as the reply-signal came up the shaft, "Rashuns c'rect, sir!" there was nothing particularly distressing in the accents of the answering voice—there was, indeed, something of merriment in the tones. And then Page re-

collected that, of course, the gang of miners could not possibly know that Nature had opened that morning her richest treasury of beauty, and had decked peaks and ranges, arms of the sea and clumps of forest, with light that was glorious and shade that was luminous. Sixty feet deep in the womb of the earth, Nature's soft moods and her harsh moods were alike to the Six. The lowering of the tempest did not increase the gloom which held them, vice-like; the radiance of a dawn which had missed its way, and arrived on this nether sphere instead of at Paradise, did not reduce its intensity by the shade of a shadow. So Page's second thoughts shaped themselves something like this, and he wasted no more sympathy on the entombed workers. After all, they were "below" because their crimes had sent them there.

To tell the exact truth, the men below in "No. 3" were almost as joyous as freeman Page himself. Page had never known what it was to have lost freedom. Therefore, he could never know what it was to be within measurable distance of acquiring it, though withheld by the Authorities. And that higher pleasure was now being enjoyed by the men below. That was

the reason why the voice owned by Mr. Jones, principal felon of "Murderers'," was slightly unsteady with laughter. They had been presented, had the men below, with a superfluity of rations that morning, and every extra ration meant another tool with which to plot their path to liberty. That was why Jones, and his co-villains, Hardy and Tooth, indulged in vibrant chuckles. Laugh! Who would not have laughed at the notion of making the System contribute to its own defeat? They had a right to laugh.

"Sixteen ounces meat, an' three of us don't want none! Three poun's! Two whole days' tucker apiece if we like to put ourselves on short commons w'en we've given 'em leg-bail. An' that's not countin' the meat!"

"Right, Jones! Without the meat. And it's not a bad lump. See!" Hardy held up the day's rations of meat—a shapeless chunk of half-raw beef. "There's an ounce or two over, I'll swear!"

"Let's weigh it, an' see!" The Other Three drew together beneath the tallow-dip, which was all they chose to illuminate the gallery with. Jones put his hand into a cup-like recess in a bank of clay and drew out their "weights."

The necessity of checking their rations and of making a fair distribution among themselves had compelled them to shape from lumps of coal "weights" of varying denominations, from an ounce to a pound. They had brought the lumps to a point nearly accurate by using a meal-ration as a standard—the meal-rations were seldom wrong, it was the meat which was frequently deficient—and the lumps could be depended upon to half an ounce. The balance-scales were supplied by the convicts' own hands.

The coal-weights in one hand, and the rations in the other—that was the way of it; and being among the elder Children of the System, they had had so much experience in checking food that they could tell at once when the ration was lighter or heavier than the symbol of weight.

"Six times twelve ounces is seventy-two ounces—that is wot, Hardy?"

"Four poun's an' a half."

Jones placed a pound "weight" and a half-pound "weight" within the canvas bag which contained their meal-ration, and taking it in his left hand, balanced in his right the beef.

"Seems right! But you try, Toothy. We'll all try!"

"Go on! Ain't we all on the square, now that we've done for—" the speaker stopped to jerk his thumb in the direction of gallery No. 2 —"them? We're goin' to trust you, Jones—ain't you willin', Hardy?"

"O' course I am! Jones is goin' to play fair —we're all a-goin' to play fair—we've taken the Oath—an' one can't get away without the others."

"Right yer are, boys, then! We'll jest be loyal brothers o' the Oath, same as we wor at th' 'Arbour. An,' o' cos, we're a-goin' to bolt together. One can't go 'lone—we've all to go, or none. Then we won't bother 'bout weighin' the rashuns no more, shall we?"

"No, o' course not!" repeated Hardy. Tooth echoed the assent.

And Jones' lips, which had grown dry in the fever of his anxiety, grew moist again.

This prince of scoundrels had determined, if the others would consent to let the rations go unweighed, that he, at least, would maintain his strength unimpaired. Plausibility, when backed by resource and ability to execute, came to the front as readily in the circle of convictdom as it does in the financial and political world of today. Jones was leader of his gang by virtue of

his eminent unscrupulousness. In a different sphere he would have amassed a fortune by speculating with other people's money. Now he proposed to wrest freedom for himself from the grasp of the Régime by using the trustfulness of his brother-rogues and their rations.

That was their one merit. Their infamy was not so stupendous as his. They really meant to obey the Oath each had taken to be faithful to his fellows. He didn't.

* * * *

"Now, boys, to work!" When Jones had issued the half-ration which was to be eaten by each that day, he reminded them of their duty.

"We've to do double tides, boys. On 'arf rashuns. But it's on'y for a week, boys; an' then, my word! won't we bite into our first free grub!" So, with example and voice he gave them the encouragement a general should always extend to his followers. And though they were hungry, they took up picks and maul and began to hew bravely at their double task.

Each had fifteen hundredweight to hew for himself.

And each had fifteen hundredweight to hew for a man in No. 2 gallery yonder.

Thirty hundredweight, each single hundredweight of one hundred and twenty pounds avoirdupois, in all, was to be the day's portion for eight consecutive days. A double portion—and only half-rations whereon to perform it. For the men in No. 2 gallery would not help.

* * * *

Three workers only — and six mustered nightly—and rations for six drawn matutinally! How was it done?

The Three in No. 2 gallery were the Three to whom Death the Emancipator had come—Phillips, Bunt, West. And the Three—Jones, Hardy, Tooth—who worked were the Three who had been the humble instruments by which the others had been granted their freedom. Phillips had been freed by Jones, Bunt by Tooth, West by Hardy, and all because the three agents of the Emancipator wanted the rations of the others to make due provision for escape.

They could only obtain the rations by putting forward the dead men at muster. If the dead men were not mustered, Page, the overman, or perhaps Lieutenant Cooke himself, would be down to investigate the cause, and a discovery

would be as fatal to Jones', Tooth's, and Hardy's chances of escape, and to their lives, as their own picks had been to the existence of the dead Three. So the nightly muster was essential; and because the dead men were mustered, it was also necessary that their tally of coal should be made up by their murderers. If the baskets went up empty for one night, that might be allowed to pass, save for the intimation next morning that the workers "had better brighten up or stand the brunt"; but a second occurrence of "empties" would almost certainly be followed by a visit from up above. On the other hand, toil as they would, it was impossible to furnish the full quota, and it was a work which bore them down with a horribly exacting strain to hew a quantity sufficient to allot to each of the two baskets now to be filled by every man two-thirds of the appointed portion.

* * * *

It was on the seventh day after Inspection Sunday that the Three had been liberated; and the night of the escape was fixed for the Saturday night midway between that Inspection Sunday and the next.

The Three were liberated, we say, on a Satur-

day night. The following morning the conversation as to the rations took place. That Sunday night the first muster happened.

"One—Two—Three—Four—Five—Six. All right! Any complaints?" asked Lieutenant Cooke. "No? then good-night!" And the iron grating, with its inch-thick bars, and its interstices between the bars of two fingers' breadth, was slammed down.

The first muster was arranged for in this wise: Jones was to take Phillips, Hardy, the cadaver of West, and Tooth that of Bunt. Each was to prop his man against the back-wall of the chamber at the foot of the shaft. And into the right hand of every corpse his mate and murderer was to place a candle. Cooke counted by heads and candles.

"'Ere yer, Phillips," quoth the facetious Jones, "jest yer stand there an' answer for yersel'. Stand up, I say." He thrust the body into a more upright position, and pulled the dead man's leathern cap over the fractured skull. "'Ere; it ain't in 'cordance with reg'lashin's that yer 'tend muster wi' yer cap on. If Cooke sees yer there'll be ructions, Phillips, ol' man." And he rammed the cap down with a succession of taps.

Hardy, in killing West, had made a very awkward job of it. The man's head fell on his breast, disclosing a fearful gash on the back of his neck. Hardy shuddered for the first time, as he pushed the head into its normal position. "Jones, give us a hand here; I can't get this fellow right." Between them they managed at last to bolster up the dead man with pieces of timber, so that his attitude should not appear strange to the mustering officer.

Tooth, with Bunt, was the least successful of the lot. All the spare timber had been used to brace West up against the wall, and do what Tooth could, he could not fix his victim in an erect posture. Moreover, he was the only one of the Three who was at present dominated by the mystery of death. He had murdered before—twice—and never yet had he felt that awful thrill which the homage of the Unconquerable Presence seldom omits to demand from feeble mortals as a preliminary tribute to their own subjugation by him. But his previous crimes had been perpetrated, one in the open field, the other in the mute solitudes of Macquarie Harbour forests, and in both cases he had fled from the blood-dyed spot the instant the fatal blow had been given. Here, however,

there was no possibility of fleeing away from the place of the murder; for a week, if the process of decomposition did not earlier drive the living forth from the weird companionship of the dead, he would be face to face with the man he had slain. His nature was vicious, hardened; but while it did not wear, on the one hand, that indurated crust of utterly conscienceless villainy which characterized Jones, it, on the other, lacked that capacity for reasoning which enabled Hardy to dissipate the superstitious notions that naturally arose from their proximity to the Three ghastlinesses. So he handled Bunt shrinkingly, and it was with a strident agony puncturing the syllables that he cried out, "Oh, Jones, come here!"

"Wot's the matter, Toothy? Don't yer like yer job? Ain't yer got a *toothsome* morsel there?" And then the wretch stopped short, for yet another foul idea had been generated within that nest of devilish inventions, his brain. If he could only induce Tooth and Hardy to use the murdered men as they had used in the Harbour wilderness the body of the boy who had confided in them when they had endeavoured to escape from Sarah Island, why, there would be all the more rations for

himself when the time came for him to bolt. He repeated his shameful pun. "W'y," he chuckled hugely, "w'y, yer don't answer, Toothy —now, w'y shu'dn't it be toothsome, Toothy, an' 'Ardy? It'll save rashuns, won't it?"

"No! no!" cried Tooth. "I couldn't a bear that 'ere. Let's 'ave none o' that. We'll have grub 'nough, 'sides."

Hardy replied more slowly, as though he were thinking carefully over the proposition. "Well," he said, "I don't see why we shouldn't! We may be stuck at Pirates' for a week or two, an' it mayn't be the season for shell-fish."

Their notion was to make for Pirates' Bay, once they had got out of the shaft.

"No!" roared Tooth, "no! I won't 'ave it. We'll have 'nough without."

There was a tremor that betokened abject fear in the wretch's voice, and Jones perforce abandoned his latest invention. His experience of his brother convicts warned him that when once they became subject to superstitious terrors the task of managing them was only to be compassed by great tact. "Orl right, old boy, but we can't 'ave too much w'en wunst we make a start. An' now wot is it?" Tooth motioned in reply to the figure which would not stand,

stark stiff though it was, against the wall. "I can't fix 'im," he said. And his frame swayed in his fear.

They had no cordage nor anything which they could tear up into strips, except the dead men's clothing, so as to tie the corpse into an attitude which would pass the muster, and Bunt would *not* stand up.

Jones was in a difficulty. If the positions of the Three did not appear natural, Lieutenant Cooke, looking down the pit to the circle of light which enabled him to count the men at muster, would call them to attention, and order the man whose attitude showed disrespect to correct his posture. He would have to salute in so doing—a regulation rendered it imperative to salute when addressed by a superior—and the fact that sixty feet of sunk shaft intervened between the superior and the prisoner did not alter the effect of the rule. Thus, unless the men were stationed so that there would be nothing abnormal in their aspect, the suspicion of the powers that were above might be excited, and discovery ensue.

It was really a question of importance how to induce the reluctant Bunt to put himself in the appropriate attitude for muster. "Bunt allus

was contrayry, —— him ! I'm sure I don't know 'ow to straighten 'im," Jones complained. "Stay, tho'." A brilliant idea struck him.

"I 'av' it—'ere, 'old 'im a second." And as Tooth shiveringly seized the corpse, Jones stepped to the corner of the chamber where they had heaped their waist-chains. A nine-foot chain once linked Phillips to Jones, Bunt to Tooth, West to Hardy. This each couple had fractured among the first preparations for their bolt, and the chains had been thrown loosely together, so that at the nightly muster they might be handy to clank when it was desirable to add another element of deception to the circumstances.

"We'll jest fix Bunt an' West together, back to back. 'Ardy, jest unprop West !"

Hardy obeyed, and lifted the cadaver to the centre of the chamber, as motioned by his leader. The latter went on, "Now, Toothy, drag yer man 'ere ; yer fellows 'old 'em back to back, and I'll fix 'em wi' the chains !" And the ingenious scoundrel so adjusted the irons that the rigid figures were linked once more in the metal embrace from which they had freed themselves in life. Back to back, with the right arm of each holding his candle, ready for ignition

when they heard from above the sounds that told of the arrival of muster-hour. A gap of a foot's breadth separated them from Phillips. His bared arm likewise stood out at right angles from the pallid trunk.

Jones stepped back a pace, and looked at the statuesque figures. "Them'll do—they'll pass muster! Orl we've got to do is not rub agen 'em, or knock 'em down, durin' the few days we shall be here! We'll hav' ter swing the baskuts clear!"

* * * *

They did pass muster for seven nights. Night after night the three live men gathered round the three dead ones, at the cry from above of "Below there!" Night after night they heard the verbal tick-off of the Lieutenant-in-Command. Night after night he asked, "Any complaints?" Night after night either he or Page, the overman, shouted down that "Number Such-an-one is short so many hundred! You are getting behind, Such-an-one! You'd better look out—Inspection Sunday is getting pretty near!" Night after night this grim farce was played, and on successive mornings (the nightly report being accurate as to numbers)

the full rations for the Six came down. And day by day the store of rations for the bolt accumulated.

* * * *

Not without interruptions, that excited the alarm of the leader and the fears of the other two, did the week pass, however.

First, the bodies began to decompose more rapidly than they had feared. The air-current that came down the ventilating shaft was insufficient to prevent the vitiation of the atmosphere of the galleries—always bad at its best, and Tooth and Hardy had determined to hurry on the moment of their attempt.

"Wait 'nother night, boys!" however, urged Jones. "I cal'clate wi' to-morrer's rashuns we'll 'ave nuff to start." And they yielded the point, as they had yielded others.

Next (Thursday) morning the smell of the charnel-house ascended to the surface. Page noticed it, and asked "what was up?" Hardy was slinging a basket; Jones was guiding the rope so that the creel in its swaying should not touch the Three; Tooth, at momentary intervals, was shaking the irons. Had the men been ironed and engaged at the foot of the shaft in the work of slinging, their shackles and their waist-

chains would, of course, ring. Hardy answered, "What, sir?"

"That smell!"

The basket in Hardy's hand twirled and twisted in his fear. The chains fell from Tooth's grasp, as he cried, "It's all up!" Jones alone had his wits about him. "Hist!" he breathed to his companions, and then cried up the shaft, "'Tis bad water, sir. It'll be over in a hour or so, sir."

"Oh, that's all! No danger of flooding?"

"None, sir! We can stand it an' keep it under. Don't want no 'sistance, sir."

"Am glad of that; short-handed here to-day. Signal if it comes too strong."

And Page, troubling not to think that never before in his experience had the mine-water given off the effluvium of the grave, turned to other business.

The living but half-poisoned Three gasped relief as the patch of blue sky came into view unobscured by Page's head and shoulders. For the day the danger was passed, but what of the morrow?

Jones was determined to stay. He did not tell his mates so, for they were bent on attempting to escape that very night. They

would not risk the morrow. Jones was, however, resolved in his own mind to stay till the Saturday night. By regulation the grating was on Sunday not thrown open for an hour and a half after the usual time. He was anxious to achieve the advantage that would be derived from the longer interval. *He* could breathe the odour and live. Why shouldn't the others? And so—he fell sick. He was very bad.

That is to say, he "shammed Abraham" most successfully. "If yer want to go, 'Ardy an' Toothy, don't mind me!" he groaned. But they dared not go without him. He was the ingenious, the resourceful one of all the party, and to leave him behind was to leave their brains. So they said they would wait, and laboured during the days that remained to fill his basket as well as their own—and those of the Liberated Three. It was strenuous their struggle; strenuous to the point of greatness their combat with hunger, with the noxiousness of death, with their own nervelessness, and with their own reeling brains, with the sharp lines of pain over the eyebrows, and with the torrid burning of their eyeballs, and with the convulsive tortures as their bodily organs refused to perform their offices. It was a miracle that

they lived. It would have been a mercy had the frenzy created by the physical pangs and mental stress of their sufferings driven them to treat each other as they had treated the First Three. Still, sustained by the dream of Freedom, and on the intangible food which Hope tendered them even in the moments of utter misery, the two not only continued to exist, but continued to work. If to do and to suffer for Freedom's sake are the attributes of greatness, surely in one aspect at least these men were great. On half-rations they existed; on half-rations they did double work.

But their leader, Jones, was of a different metal. Winning them over to perfect trustfulness in himself and in his ingenuity, he spent the day lying in the least fœtid gallery scheming and "shamming Abraham," and the nights, such portion of them, at least, as he did not pass in sleep, in the mastication of a portion of the stored-up rations. It had become impossible now to think of weighing the food, even had the others suspected him; and so, night after night, he made a hearty meal, and kept up his strength on something more tangible and substantial than the elixir of Hope—not that he refused to derive strength from that source also.

During the nights and during the days he laughed at the folly of his companions! The only fear he had was the dread of discovery before *he* could make his escape.

* * * *

The others had that fear also, but in addition Hardy and Tooth—Hardy's nerve and power of reason had broken down like the other man's—were tormented by superstitious horrors. That very night of the day on which it had appeared imminent Page would discover the murders, Tooth disturbed the galleries with terror-stricken cries. The dead men had come to life, he fancied, and were upon him. Jones soothed him as well as he could, only to hear him an hour or two later praying fervently to God to be forgiven, "an' he would kill no more, an' would confess everythin'." With the morning light, or that faint tinge of it which penetrated to the vitals of the earth down the shaft, Tooth recollected himself, and he reflected that God was less awful than the System. God, after all, was distant, very distant from the Pit, while the System and the Régime were near, very near! So, in the hours of labour, the terrors disappeared—only to come back with renewed potency in the night-time. Tooth,

that next night, cried out that now he would bargain with the devil if he would free him from the clutch of Bunt's hands which were round his throat. Then, mingling the present with the past, he wanted to know why Jones had not permitted him to eat the dead as they had done at Macquarie Harbour! Only an hour before the grating was thrown open in the morning did he fall into a delirious sleep.

Hardy, the same night, had his delusions also. To him likewise the Three were alive: they were clanking their chains; they were mounting to the pit mouth to report their own murder, and formally to complain to the Lieutenant. Then the phantoms, born of his fear, changed, and he was struggling with West. West had killed him, and was doing what he himself and Jones and Tooth had done to the boy in the Harbour wilderness. West's teeth were sharp, he cried, so sharp! Once more the weird fancy varied, and he was a boy playing in grassy meadows, racing down the village street, blowing the church organ. Again, he was in the city Town Hall before the magistrates, who slided, somehow, into the judges of Assize, who were beating him with the white-tipped wands of the under-sheriffs. And yet

again he was fighting in the waist of the floating hell which bears him onwards, onwards over starlit seas and through the furnace fires which afflict the damned to—oh, where was he? The horrors were grimly vivid, and alternately, when consciousness came to him with the morning light, he blasphemed and he prayed.

* * * *

Bunt the dead, Bunt the liberated, had (as already related) owned a watch-nick—a tiny saw filed out of the tempered steel of a watch-spring. As leader of the Other Three, Jones had taken possession of the nick. It was the instrument of their freedom; and who was better entitled to hold it than the captain of the party? No one! said Jones. The others did not demur, for they trusted Jones.

On the Friday night, soon after "muster," during which the First Three had behaved themselves "decently an' in order," as Mr. Jones observed with delicious humour, he (Jones), chuckling inwardly and groaning audibly, so that his mates should not fail to understand how painfully he toiled in their service, mounted the gaps in the shaft to a height where he could conveniently attack the grating. Before the

liberation of the First Three several wall-planks had been loosened, so that when the time for escape arrived the gaps would serve for foot-hold spaces. The ascent was scaled by the daring Jones, and the topmost of the loosened planks was placed across the angle formed by two walls. From this stage or bridge he could reach the grating.

For four hours he plied, with a touch as deft and delicate as a lapidary handling a precious stone, the miniature saw. The under surface only dare he manipulate that night. The marks of the tool, potent for liberty though they were, were too faint to be noticed by any unsuspecting person. Still, he thought it best to spread a handful of coal dust over the almost imperceptible cuts. With one hand gripping the bars, he used the saw with the other. The exertion was not great, but the mental strain, as the saw refused now and then to "bite," and he had to withdraw it to feel, *with his tongue*, if the serration was still perfect, was terrible. He could not trust the horny surface of his hand to tell if the teeth were still unbroken and unblunted, so he passed the saw across his tongue at intervals. At the end of the four hours there was but the slightest dulling to be distinguished.

He thanked God that the man who had made the saw had been so eminent a workman.

He descended to assure his comrades that all was well. He had done half the job—had sawn half through all of the bars requisite to be withdrawn to permit egress.

"'Tis orl right, ol' pals! orl right! The nick 'll keep good!"

"Thank God!" exclaimed Hardy.

"That's wot I sez!" responded the leader. "Amen. Say Amen, Toothy!"

"Amen!" cried Tooth.

* * * *

On the Saturday, the baskets went up very indifferently laden.

"It's lucky for you, boys," cried Overman Page, "that to-morrow ain't inspection. Now, if you don't want to be dosed, ye'll ha' to be brisk this next fortnight."

The remark was received with silent laughter by the Other Three.

"Lor'! won't they be savage w'en they finds as 'ow there'll be nobody to flog for a-bein' short. Bet yer a 'arf-rashun to nothink, Toothy, that jest out o' spite they flogs the stiffs! I say, Phillips, ol' boy, 'ud the cat 'urt yer much now? Tell us, pal, tell us! Or, is it that there

ain't no cat in 'ell? 'As the System got a monerp'ly in cats? Tell us, ol' chap."

Thus the pleasant-tempered Jones. But Phillips would not answer.

* * * *

They prepared the First Three for their final muster. Which was also to be their own final muster.

And when the grating was slammed down and the "Good-night" said, they began to prepare for their escape.

"I'm a-goin' up to file t'other part o' the bars, pals. W'ile I'm 'way, d'yer get out th' grub an' pack it in th' shirts."

For use, on Inspection Sundays only, each man had a shirt. These, Jones had designed, should be employed to carry the stock of rations.

He went up. "Stand from below!" he cried. When he reached the first loose plank, he threw it down. "No need now," he laughed, "to put 'em back. Keep from under, pals, in case I might 'urt yer!" The tender considerateness of his accents!

Plank after plank he threw down; some struck the carrion which had been the First

Three, others fell clear of the carcases. And as each plank fell he mounted higher.

For five hours he worked. It was the deep of night when he cut through the last bar. He had sawn through eight. An aperture of two feet in width was left. That was enough for *him* to get out of, he reflected, and if it was too narrow for the others, perhaps they might not need to use it, after all. As he withdrew the bars, he slid them on top of the grating—save one. Then he returned.

At the bottom he found his pals waiting for him in gruesome silence. Each was glaring at the other with an unspoken thought in his eye.

"Wot's up, pals? W'y ain't the grub packed up?"

Hardy spoke. "The meat's bad—tainted, all gone!"

Tooth spoke. "'Tis alon' of them —— stiffs. We're goin' to starve arter all; we can't bolt on meal an' candles!"

Jones did not speak for some time. He was stunned, apparently. Of course it was only apparently; he had known the fact for days!

"That's bad, boys! I 'spose nothink can be done?" He crouched into No. 5 gallery, "the Store," as though to taste the meat.

Hardy followed him, after a minute's lapse, and, stooping closely over him, whispered,—

"We'd better do for Tooth, Jones. He's weak—and we'll want all grub for oursel's!"

Jones replied in the same tone: "Sh, 'Ardy! Let's play fair. We've all a-tak'n the Oath!"

Then he went into the chamber, telling Hardy to pick out the less corrupt of the meat.

In the chamber Tooth whispered to him: "Jones," he pleaded, "let's kill Hardy! You an' me'll go, Jones! We'll 'ave 'nough then!"

"Oh, be fair, Toothy, sonny! 'Member we've taken the Oath. Let's play fair!"

The loyalest of creatures, Jones!

* * * *

"Who's to go first?" queried the general—never a greater general than when he put the question!

"W'y you, o' course, Jones; you've done all th' work," Tooth replied. Hardy did not dissent.

"As yer please, boys. Then, which'll go next? Yer'd better draw the straw."

He pulled from a slab two splinters of unequal length, and held out their ends to his companions.

"Draw together; shortest goes nex' ter me."

It was Hardy's fate! Had he drawn the other, he'd have died with one murder the less to his account.

* * * *

With a bag of provisions round each of their necks, they began the ascent. They had propped the First Three up again, and used them, in all their noxious corruption, as aids in their exodus. "We've helped 'em to Freedom," commented Jones, "'tis only right they should give us a leg up."

Half-way up Jones stopped. "Plenty o' time, boys. No hurry. An' yer'd better 'and me yer bag, 'Ardy; I'm stronger'n you. 'Old tight ter me w'iles yer looses it." Hardy—fool!—obeyed.

Ten feet higher Jones paused again.

"Toothy, 'and yer bag to 'Ardy. W'iles yer does it, I'll climb an' jest put my grub outside; I'll be freer to 'elp yer."

They trusted him still, and while he clambered up, Tooth passed his bag to Hardy. Jones went back to where he had left them.

"Steady, lads, for the last tussle! Don't lose 'art now, pals! an' keep a clear 'ead."

They had left one solitary dip to light them in their ascent. It was the merest flicker that

reached them at this forty-feet stage; it showed them each other's outlines, that was all. Had the flame been brighter, perhaps Hardy would have seen Jones' face, and Tooth, Hardy's, and each had then been warned.

A few feet higher, and Jones, holding tightly to a plank-rim by one hand, lowered his head till he reached Hardy's.

"Now, 'Ardy, stash 'im with yer foot! we want orl th' grub for oursel's!"

The devilish hint spoke Hardy's own mind. He thrust one of his feet downwards, and with a horrid yell Tooth was—liberated. The light went out.

* * * *

"Well done, 'Ardy! An' now it's me an' you."

The accent of approbation changed in its breathing into one of menace. And with the change fell, on Hardy's head, a blow with a cut bar. At least, it had been intended for his head, but, through the going out of the light, the blow was misdirected, and slipped on his shoulder.

Hardy shrieked, "God! That's your playin' fair, is it! But if I go, ye'll go too."

He sprang upwards—the instinct of ven-

geance guided him aright in the darkness—and he clutched the waistband of Jones' trousers. One awful struggle in mid-air, and——

The rest of the Other Three were liberated.

A DAY WITH GOVERNOR ARTHUR*

COLONEL GEORGE ARTHUR is sitting in an arm-chair in his study. The deep whirr of a clock (by Dent, London: you can see it, if not hear it, to-day in a Hobart public

* This narrative is mainly founded upon conversations with a prominent official—he died only the other day—who was for some years immediately associated with Colonel Arthur. Documentary evidence is, in addition, extant for nearly every statement made in the course of the tale, and the words put into the mouth of the characters are mere paraphrases of utterances of their originals. The "police reports" and convict "records" quoted are authentic in every particular; "Longden's" letter is that of a veritable convict. In the wording of the Executioner's Oath, the author has followed his informant instead of transcribing another form which he has in his possession, which, however, does not differ very materially from the former. "The Sheriff's bidding," which concludes the administration of the oath, was uttered, it is asserted, on as recent an occasion in England as the appointment of that late honoured servant of the State, Calcraft.

office) as it strikes the hour of ten is audible. He is always punctual is Governor Arthur, Lieutenant-Governor of Vandemonia—always has been—always will be. There are some men whose past unerringly foretells their future. Arthur is one of these men. When, as representative of British Majesty, he flogged a woman in his West Indian principality, he concluded his order for the punishment with the word "punctually." When he signs a death-warrant now, he hands it to the Clerk of Council with the remark, "Let the warrant be obeyed punctually." When his doctor tells him in the course of a few years that Death will wait upon him after the expiration of an hour, you may depend upon it Sir George, as he will be then, will simply request the medical man to present his compliments to the gentleman with the scythe, and desire him to be punctual. And as he is in precept so he is in practice.

At the first stroke of ten, then, His Excellency sits him down, and begins the day's routine. It is an "off-day"—that is to say, His Excellency does not this morning propose to do his Executive Councillors the pleasure of going through the form of conferring with them upon points as to which he has already made up his

mind. Consequently, there being no Executive Council to bother him, he proceeds to act as the Executive.

We are going to spend the day with him. It is very rude of us, no doubt, as we have not been invited. And particularly rude, inasmuch as we know that on the rare occasions that the Governor departs from his repose of manner it is to consign all scribblers to the nethermost abode of lost souls. Frank Goddard, convict, otherwise "Frank the Poet," peopled hell with penal officials. Governor Arthur peopled *his* hell with journalists.

* * * *

It is a spare-framed, thin-faced, medium-sized man who sits in the Governor's chair; clean-shaven, save for a tinge of greyish whisker; with steely-grey eyes that look with a critical disbelief in everything except the System; with a rasp in the voice. The lines at the corners of the drawn-down lips spell "Martinet"; the wrinkles of the brow and the crevices between the eyebrows tell that he is a precisian. At this present moment he is supreme over the destinies of 32,000 human beings, and he looks capable of dealing justly with 32,000 blocks of pine or gum-wood. That, possibly, is why he is

Lieutenant-Governor of His Britannic Majesty's colony and dependency of Van Dieman's Land. A man with a heart would have been out of place in that chair.

* * * *

He touches a bell—twice. Mr. J. Fubster, Comptroller-General of Convicts, enters, bows deferentially, and is motioned to a chair.

"Good-morning, Mr. Comptroller!"

A soft "Good-morning, your Excellency," is breathed by Fubster. He is at liberty to begin now with business—and to seat himself.

"This day's business, your Excellency, is applications for Tickets for November last."

"Proceed, Mr. Comptroller!"

Standing up and clearing his throat, the Comptroller began: "Memorial No. 666, Police No. 699, James Melrose, per *Malabar*, Middlesex Sessions, 30th June, 182–, life; Hobart Town, 5th August, 182–, seven years, same date, seven years; total term of transportation, life and fourteen years. Employed by Mrs. C. Wade, and recommended for ticket by her. Transported for burglary. His gaol report: 'In Newgate before,' and his hulk report was 'orderly.' He stated this offence, breaking into

a house. Colonial convictions are as follows:— August 5, 182–, by Supreme Court, stealing a pair of boots; plea, guilty; sentence, seven years' transportation to Macquarie Harbour. Same date and court, stealing soap; plea, guilty; sentence, seven years' transportation to Macquarie Harbour. March 27, 1827, exchanging his hat with prisoner who was about to abscond, 50 lashes. June 27, 182–, destroying his shirt, 25 lashes. October 28, 182–, not accomplishing his weekly task of work, 18 lashes. February 14, 1832, ordered 50 lashes by employer for disrespectful conduct and insolence to Miss Ann Wade, 50 lashes, and returned to service. November 20, 1832, drunk, admonished."

"Who signs?"

"Mr. Muster-Master Mason, your Excellency."

"What do you recommend?"

"I cannot recommend, sir."

"Quite right, Mr. Comptroller. There seems a hiatus in his record between 182– and 1832. There must be some mistake there. It is impossible that a man of this desperate character should have committed no offences for several years!"

"That's what *I* think, your Excellency."

"Reprimand the record clerk——"

"The record clerk is a transport, sir."

"A transport! And to make such a serious omission! It must be intentional, Mr. Comptroller. Have him punished, sir—send him to the chain-gang."

"May I suggest, sir, that I should merely dock his allowances and severely caution him? He's a very useful writer, sir, on the whole."

"Oh, in that case, Mr. Comptroller, punish him as you suggest. And note, please, that this ticket is refused."

And so was Mr. James Melrose's chance of obtaining temporary freedom put back for at least six, and probably twelve months. On the hypothesis, as likely as not entirely erroneous, that the record clerk had made a serious mistake in transcribing, from the registers, on No. 699's report parchment the debits against his name, that perverse son of the System was doomed to a continued period of slavery. What to precisian Colonel Arthur, and what to disciplinarian Fubster, was it that the transport might be rendered desperate by the non-success of his mighty effort to win a "ticket" by good conduct? To the Men of the Régime

it should have been easy enough to have read between the lines of the record. A man naturally of weak disposition, made worse by unspeakable surroundings and petty tyrannies—with impulses towards good even at Macquarie Harbour (witness that exchange of hats)—then coming under a master or mistress of more than average kindness of heart, whom he would, in the intervals of good conduct, brave by an occasional act of insolence or insubordination—that was this character obviously to men who understood the System.

Now, Colonel Arthur and Factotum Fubster professed to know the System. They knew, however, but the one side of it. The gap in No. 699's record was to them nothing but a convict-writer's error. That it could be accounted for by Melrose's abstinence from ill-doing—pooh! impossible! And so No. 699 was "put back."

* * * *

"Next!"

"Memorial No. 667. Cole, Richard, Lancaster Assizes, 22nd April, 182–, life. Application recommended by Mr. J. England, J. A. Jackson, Esq., J. Simpson, Esq., and Mr. R. Court. Now employed in Freed Police, Campbell Town.

Transported for stealing from the person; gaol report, 'twice convicted before'; hulk report, 'good.' Stated this offence, pocket-picking; denies having been convicted before. Colonial convictions: November 2, 182-, Supreme Court, aiding and abetting in assault on a woman, not guilty. January 11, 182-, Magistrate Fisher, neglect of duty for the last three days, 50 lashes, and 3rd class. February 8, 182-, absent from his gang, between 10 and 11 o'clock this day, 25 lashes. April 23, 182-, disobedience of orders and other improper conduct, 25 lashes. February 3, 182-, W. Abel, magistrate, assault, 25 lashes. March 10, 182-, same magistrate, threatening and abuse, six months' chain-gang and return to his master. June 18, 182-, chain-gang overseer, for being in state of intoxication at muster, sentenced him to 21 days' additional chain-gang. March 11, 182-, Abel, magistrate, neglect of duty, one month of irons at New Norfolk. March 31, 183-, in Public Works Gang, very riotous conduct, and assaulting watchman; transported to penal settlement for two years. June 16, 182-, by penitentiary superintendent, for reporting himself as sick, and not having anything the matter with him; reprimanded. December 26, 183-, by superior

officer of Field Police, neglect of duty; fined 10*s*."

"Who signs?"

"Muster-Master Mason."

"And your recommendation is——?"

"I regret, your Excellency, that this man has been allowed to join the police. The circumstances attending the assault on the woman for which he was tried are still strong in my recollection, as it occurred in my own neighbourhood."

"But he was found not guilty, did you not say?"

"Yes, sir, but——"

"Then, why say anything about the offence?" demanded the just Governor. He was always just was Arthur! A desire to be just was his strong point, he used to say.

"Apart from that altogether though, Mr. Comptroller," the Governor went on, as Fubster remained silent, "the applicant must be refused. The man seems a most improper subject for the police; but, being in it, the opportunity may be afforded him to prove that he is a reformed character."

"Yes, your Excellency. Shall I minute that observation?"

"Certainly. Now the next."

And, delaying just a minute to record the fact that Richard Cole, No. 473, per *Elphinstone*, would be allowed to derive further advantage from the moral associations of the Freed Police, the Comptroller-General passed to another of the current applications for tickets.

'Memorial No. 668, Police No. 1,701, Henfrey, Simon, tried at Nottingham, March, 182–, life. Recommended by Messrs. Hill, Gunning, and Butcher. Employed by Messrs. Bignell and Hill. Transported for sheep-stealing. Gaol report, 'not known before; good in gaol.' Hulk's report, 'orderly.' Stated his offence, sheep-stealing. Hath no colonial offence recorded. Mason signs."

"No offence?" queried His Excellency. "Shall we give him a ticket?"

"Well, sir, I think not. He has not served the regulated period," rejoined the Comptroller-General."

"Refused, then!" said the Governor. And No. 1,701 was "put back" also.

"Memorial No. 669, Police No. 2,693. Porter, John. Tried at Stafford, 17th October, 182–. Seven years. Recommended by J. T. Gellibrand, Esq., who employs him. Transported

for stealing from the person. Gaol report: 'An incorrigible youth; has been many times in prison, and connected with Wolverhampton thieves. Orderly in gaol.' Stated his offence, 'Stealing five shillings from a young woman; twice for leaving my master.' Hath no colonial offences on record. The Muster-Master signs."

"What do you say, Mr. Comptroller?"

"This, your Excellency, is another case where applicant has not served the regulated period."

"The transport is incorrigible, eh? Still, we must encourage him to hope, conditional on improvement. Refused at present, but as he brought so bad a character, it is gratifying to perceive that his conduct has been uniformly correct. Grant him a ticket on the King's birthday. We must never shut out hope altogether from the convicts, Mr. Comptroller. That has always been my policy, as you know. And I am stating it at great length to Lord Goderich by the outgoing mail. Are there many more applications?"

"Some fifty, your Excellency. The next has some peculiar circumstances connected with it, sir. The applicant, of fair conduct enough, obtained his master's frank to the cover of the

application, which was directed, of course, to the Muster-Master, and then pasted a slip over the address. Upon the slip there was a British address, and inside the form he enclosed a letter for an English friend!"

"The rascal!" exclaimed His Excellency. "And how was the fraud detected?"

"Well, sir, the ignorant fellow thought his master's signature would frank the letter out of the colony, as well as within it! That not being the case, the Post Office stopped the letter, sent it back to Captain Hepburn, the transport's master, and, of course, the thing was discovered."

"Then how does the application come before me? An application from such a man—why, 'tis scandalous!"

"So I remarked, your Excellency, but Captain Hepburn said he was prepared to overlook the wrong because of the man's ingenuity and the good tone of his letter. I have the letter here. Shall I read it, sir?"

His Excellency assented, and Mr. Fubster read this:—

ST. PAULS PLAINS, VAN DEMANS LAND,

May 6th.

DEAR GEORGE.—This is now the first time that I have had the opportunity of writing to you since my arrival in this Forighn Land you desired me to write and Let you Know how I am doing. I must first tell you of my voyage across. There was Three Hundred of us poor fellows confined in one Deck 6 in a bed with very little to eat or Drink but I had better luck than the rest for I had a situation on board to serve out stores to the men so I Got on very well we had a very Good voyage of four Months we were all sent to a place called a tench and there we were signed off to Defferent masters I am cook at Mr. Hebron Esq Dear George you cannot forme any Idea of the Troble I have been I had to wear Heavy Irons on my Legs for 3 months because I should not run away this is an aweful country for you dont Know when you are safe for there are men prowling about who stile themselves Bushrangers who when they are Hungry come to our Huts and tye our Hands and then proseed to rob and plunder the House and if we offer any resistance they will Shoot you dead on the spot they rob the House and then make one of us carry the spoil into the bush. there was three at large last week who have been doing Horrible deeds among which they went into a publick House in the interior of this County not far from where there. Dear Friend I have that Bible still which your beloved parrent gave me and every time I look at it my heart Bleads to think how happy and comfortable I was then. Remember me to your kind and affectionate Wife & Family & Mrs Barton, and Tom tell him from me to be steady and industrous and not to be led away by the girls as they will shure to bring him ruin. Give my love to all the family ann I hope and trust they will

forgive me for my ingratitude to them after the Kindness they had shone to me Dear George would you be so Kind as to go to Mr Greenwood for me and remember me Kindly to Him & Family and tell him were I am as he promised to do a little for me ask him to ask my uncle to send me an accordian as I think It might be of service to me here as there is none in the county, I have seen. Remember me to all my Friends that inquier after me Dear George write to me as soon as you can as I long to here from you how things are going on at home. I hope you will pardon me for Troubleing you with a letter But I Know you to be a Friend that I can Trust When you write to me Direct to Capt. Hepburn Esq. Rays Hill St Pauls Plains Van Demans Land

I have nothing more to say at Present May God Prosper you and your Family Adieu

D. G. be shure and wite A. S. LONGDEN.

N. B. The master I am With is Capt. Hepburn, Esq. J.P. Brother-in-Law to Thos. Hosie Esq. Manager at Millers Wharf. London.

"Well!" exclaimed Arthur as Fubster concluded the reading. "And in face of that letter, the man's master recommends him for a ticket! Remove the employer from the list of eligibles, and send the man to the chain-gang."

"Yes, your Excellency, but—ah, may I suggest, sir, that the Captain has great—er—home influence?"

"H'm, ah! Perhaps the case, then, as regards the master will be met by a respectful letter

pointing out that discipline will be subverted if he displays the like tolerance in the future. Why, he actually compounds a felony—obtaining a postal frank by false pretences is a felony, is it not?"

The Comptroller hesitates in his reply, and then begs to suggest that as the law is not quite explicit on the point, the question should be referred to the Crown-Solicitor. "'Tis an unusual offence, your Excellency—can scarcely have been anticipated by the Honourable the Council."

"Nevertheless, Mr. Comptroller, once done the deed will be repeated. Mr. Solicitor shall prepare a draft-clause making the offence felony."

"And the man, sir—the transport Longden?"

"I leave him to your jurisdiction, Comptroller. But, of course, ticket refused, and, I should think, the chain-gang."

And at a later period of the day Transport Longden is awarded, in his absence, twelve months' gang "for abusing his master's confidence."

* * * *

The ingenious Longden having been thus helped forward to the next stage to perdition,

Comptroller-General Fubster passed to other applications.

"A woman, your Excellency. Memorial No. 690. Ship No. 108, per *Fairlie*, Louisa Newnes; place of trial not known and transport refuses to state, but sentence, she says, 14 years——"

"Make a note, Mr. Comptroller, to ascertain how it is that the ship's indent was so imperfect. I must draw the Colonial Secretary's attention to the circumstance, and cause the Indent-clerk to be punished. What was the ship's captain about, to start with imperfect papers?"

"The ship started with papers complete, sir, but a male transport—the *Fairlie* was a double-classer,* sir—acting as surgeon's clerk, dropped all the papers overboard, with a 16-lb. shot attached."

"Mr. Comptroller! how is it I never heard of this before?" In his wrath, the Governor rose from his chair. "And why was not the Surgeon-Superintendent punished for employing a convict-writer contrary to Regulation in that case made and provided?"

"'Twas in Governor Sorell's time, sir! And he thought the least said soonest mended, par-

* "Double-classer": A ship conveying both male and female transports.

ticularly as the writer was, sir—dead, sir, when the ship arrived!"

"Dead? Oh, was that the yard-arm case?"

"Yes, your Excellency!"

"Ah, I recollect now. And was nothing done to the Surgeon?"

"Oh, yes, sir. We were short of doctors at the time, and so he was put on the permanent staff. It was Dr. Burleigh, sir!"

"Burleigh, was it? A good officer and a careful one now, whatever he may have been in the past. But proceed, Mr. Comptroller."

"She is recommended by Mr. J. Hutchinson and A. Turnbull, Esq. She says her gaol report was bad, and that she was capitally convicted at Newgate, receiving sentence of death, but commuted to two years in the penitentiary and fourteen beyond seas. States offence as stealing silver teapot. Colonial report: Theft, committed for trial."

"You recommend?"

"Yes, your Excellency. The female is at present in the House of Correction under sentence. But the Surgeon wishes her to take the situation of nurse at the hospital, as she is skilful and kind-hearted."

"Under what sentence, did you say?"

The Comptroller re-scans the parchment and the application-form, but the information is not given in either document.

"Unstated, sir, I'm sorry to say!"

"Unstated, Mr. Comptroller! Is this a way to prepare a report for me? Her record says, 'Committed for trial.' How was she then disposed of?"

"She must have been sentenced, sir!" The Comptroller sees he is "in for it," and not enjoying the Colonel in one of his black moods, mentally resolves to make somebody suffer. "And the convict-writer must have omitted to enter the conviction."

"See that he's punished, Mr. Comptroller. And reprimand the Free Clerk in charge of the office!"

"Yes, your Excellency. We must make an example! So much depends on the records being accurately kept. What are your orders as to this woman, sir? The doctor wishes her services particularly."

"No, in this case I must refuse! Appointment to a nursing post would be an indulgence the woman does not merit. She herself says her home record was bad, and most likely her transportation-sentence was life, and that she

is lying when she says it was for fourteen years only. No indulgence!"

Thus it was nearly always. A transport's statement against himself or herself was almost invariably accepted by the Authorities, but he or she was never believed when there was a possibility of the statement being in the transport's own favour.

Thus, too, was it generally in the matter of negligently-written-up records. It was a convict-writer who was punished; it was the Free Clerk, or the other official, who was really the offending person, who got off scot-free. Which was just; for a convict-writer was by virtue of the fact liable to punishment. The Régime did not recognise convict-writers, and, indeed, distinctly prohibited their employment; and, therefore, if they consented to be employed, they disobeyed "the Regulation in that case made and provided." The circumstance that they dare not refuse to be employed when so directed by an authority—say, the Governor or the Comptroller-General—went, of course, for nothing. If there was one thing more than another the System was partial to, it was the construction of dilemmas; and though the transport might object to being impaled on

one horn, there was always the other at his convenience.

* * * *

While we have been making this digression, Colonel Arthur has been refusing more and more applications, occasionally, it must be said, varying the process by an approval. One "Approved" to ten "Refused," that was about the average.

The list ended, the Governor condescended to consult the inferior (though still potent) official as to the terms of a despatch he was drafting to Viscount Goderich, Secretary of State for the Colonies.

"I chiefly desire, Mr. Comptroller, your opinion on this portion. It is with reference to the special and educated convicts, and their proposed treatment at Port Arthur. I am loth to abandon Macquarie Harbour as a Penal Settlement—we have derived great advantage from it—but the filling up of the bar is rendering navigation dangerous. So I have made up my mind to direct the abandonment of the Harbour, and to devote my attention to all the measures best calculated to render Tasman's Peninsula, which really seems to have been designed by

Providence for a penitentiary, a perfect institution. Do you follow me, Mr. Comptroller?"

"Oh, most readily, sir. And if I may be permitted to say so, if any one can devise a perfect penal establishment I am sure 'tis your Excellency!"

"Yes, Mr. Comptroller, I do not doubt my success, if I can depend upon the willing co-operation of able and experienced officers like yourself!"

"That, your Excellency, I need scarcely trouble to assure you of. The Staff are only too proud to have the opportunity of working under so brilliant and—er—h'm—philanthropic an administrator! You were saying about the specials, sir?"

"Oh, yes," and the pleased Governor, who, with all his strength of character, was never to be offended by the most fulsome of compliments, especially when they alluded to his philanthropy, went on to read what he had written.

"This is what I say to his Lordship in recommending the despatch to Port Arthur of this special class. 'The educated class are at present the link by which the free and the bond

are so amalgamated as to make the distinction betwixt slavery and freedom less marked than it ought to be. It is desirable there should be no such mingling—a man should be either free or bond, and be treated as such.'"

"Very good, if I may say so, your Excellency. Most admirably put."

The Governor continued: "'I have long disapproved of the employment of convict clerks under any circumstances, and have taken every prudent means of limiting their numbers, for I am convinced that convict discipline cannot be considered perfect until every special is treated as an ordinary convict.'"

"That's true, your Excellency."

"'For if one receive indulgence irregularly, or be placed in any easy situation, enabling him to assume a respectable appearance, the System is broken in upon, and a single representation to his friends in England will be sufficient to deprive transportation of much of its terrors. Criminals do not, when writing to their friends, dwell upon the hardships they suffer, but rather delight in holding up the bright side of the picture.'"

"Quite accurate, your Excellency, quite!" Yet Longden's letter was before them!

"'As it appears specials dread transportation less than any other class, I have made arrangements for their deportation, upon arrival here, to Tasman's Peninsula, should such be the pleasure of His Majesty's Government, where they will be deprived even of the hope of eluding by artifice the miseries they have drawn upon themselves.' There, how will that do, Mr. Comptroller?"

"It must carry conviction to the Imperial Government, your Excellency, of the wisdom of your proposed step."

"Yes, I think it will. And the Right Honourable the Secretary of State will not fail to appreciate an argument I propose to communicate unofficially, that the presence in the streets of this city of special convicts, who, for the most part, come from the upper order of society, is a direct inducement to the circulation of those revolutionary ideas which are so subversive of Law, Order and Society. How can the lower classes retain respect for the upper orders if members of the latter are seen walking public streets under the convict ban?"

"Very true, your Excellency, very true!"

"Then you agree, Mr. Comptroller, generally with my views?"

"Oh, yes! your Excellency, I can suggest no improvement."

"Then send the clerk who is your best penman to me in the morning. It is a most important despatch, as it quite alters our System, and I must have a clear copy for Downing Street made with the utmost care."

"Shall the clerk be 'free' or 'bond,' sir?"

"Oh, your best."

"Then the ablest man I have, your Excellency, is Convict-writer Dallas."

"Well, let him be here at ten punctually tomorrow. And now," rising as he spoke, "this completes your business with me for the day?"

"Yes, sir, with the exception of one little matter—the executioner's oath."

"Ah! I was forgetting! Is the man in attendance? If so, produce him."

* * * *

Convict Richard Johnson, successor to Dougherty in the onerous and well-paid post of hangman to His Majesty's Government in Vandemonia, had shown a tendency of late to partiality in the performance of his duties. After the last but two "dropping off," it was rumoured that one of the criminals who had, it was sup-

posed, been hurried into the next world had been resuscitated within the time prescribed for the suspension of the body. The rumour as to this occurrence had not reached the ears of the Authorities for three or four weeks after the ceremony; and owing to the lapse of that time, and to the admixture of quicklime with the bodies which participated in the rites, it had been deemed inexpedient to attempt exhumation. The Authorities, though content to let the matter—and the bodies—rest, thought it, however, advisable to prevent a further instance of the like partiality, and concluded that there was no better way of securing their end than by imposing what had for some years dropped into disuse—the executioner's oath.

Mr. Johnson, being so important a functionary, and the occasion being so novel, it was thought well to impress him by administering the oath in the overawing presence of the Governor himself. The formula was to be the ancient English one, and the incidents of the scene were framed after the same pattern. Only, instead of the Testament being tendered to the Executioner by the Sheriff, as was the old English practice, the Comptroller-General, being the convict's nominal master and the man to whom

Johnson was in the last resort responsible, was to administer the oath.

Johnson was ushered in. He brought with him, pursuant to instructions, a bag.

He saluted, and in obedience to a motion of Mr. Fubster's hand, arranged the contents of the bag on a table. Two pairs of handcuffs, a set of double leg-irons with bazils and centre-link complete, and a new fifteen-foot rope, gathered in a coil. A white cap and a black cap completed the number of the dread insignia.

"You are Richard Johnson, per ship *Mangles*?" demanded the Comptroller.

The executioner pulled his forelock.

"You are the public executioner of His Majesty's Colony and Dependency of Van Dieman's Land?"

Johnson scraped his right foot and bent his head.

"Hitherto you have been unsworn, but it has been thought necessary by his Excellency the Governor that you should take an oath for the faithful, exact, true and impartial performance of your duties. Are you willing to take that obligation?"

"Yes, y'r Honour!"

The Comptroller-General lifted a Testament

—there were always copies available in every public office; oaths were taken at every hour of the day—and, opening the book at one of the Gospels, bade Johnson place his left hand on the rope, and take the book in his right.

"Now, Johnson, follow me!" As the Comptroller read these words from a slip of blue paper, Johnson recited them after him :—

"I, Richard Johnson, Transport, acting under a ticket-of-leave as present executioner, do willingly undertake to well, faithfully, exactly and truly perform the duties appertaining to the office of the Common Executioner of His Majesty's Colony of Van Dieman's Land, and do now vow and make oath that I will carry out and fulfil such duties as the Law may direct upon the bodies and persons of every felon committed to my charge without fear or favour, though the body and person be that of friend or kin, my father or my mother, my sister or my brother, my wife or my child, or other bone of my bone, or of other flesh of my flesh, So help me, God!"

Then he kissed the book.

The Comptroller turned to His Excellency. "Must the—ah—old command be given, your Excellency?"

The Governor motioning assent, the Comptroller, raising his right hand, and speaking with as much harshness as he could throw into his voice, cried,—

"GET THEE HENCE, WRETCH!"

THE *HENRY PORCHER* BOLTER

WITHIN a stone's throw of the house in Church Street, Richmond, Victoria, wherein Peter Lalor died, is a cottage which is as ancient a building as you will find in the suburbs of young Melbourne. Dilapidated inside, weather-stained as to exterior, for years it has been without tenants for longer periods than it has enjoyed them. It would have had fewer still had its landlord's agent informed intending lessees of the eerie legend of the place.

For here it was that one of the "bolters," advertised by Mr. F. A. Hely, J.P., Principal Superintendent of Convicts, in the *Sydney Gazette*, in the year 1827, was found one morning, in the early seventies, stark-stiff dead.

* * * *

How the writer came to know him need not

here be related. Suffice it that between us there was an intimacy of a kind. He tolerated the schoolboy, and the schoolboy regarded him with something of respect and more of fear. For he was not a lovable character.

Two services did the ex-convict do to the schoolboy. He introduced him to the System and the Régime—a service which was of very questionable value. And he made him free of a marvellous collection of books. As to which privilege also the writer has his doubts. If he had not had permission to ramble at will through the bolter's books, he might have developed into a portly and wealthy banker, instead of a hard-up journalist.

This last remark is not altogether by the way. Had it not been for the "bolter" and his books probably these "Tales of the Régime" would never have been written.

* * * *

His books were everywhere in the house. From the hall-entrance to the back door, from the basement to the attic ceiling they were filed in lobbies and rooms, on staircases and in fireplaces. They blocked window-recesses and obscured sky- and fan-lights. Narrow passages,

the breadth of a man's frame, wormed through the heaps of volumes, so that he could make his way to any particular class of work desired. For he preserved amidst apparent chaos a system of arrangement, and though he absolutely dispensed with the use of shelving, he could, without difficulty, find a book when he wanted it.

Literally surrounded by his books, he lived the life of a solitary. But one person was admitted to the house—the aforesaid schoolboy. Even the carrier who brought home the parcels of his purchases from Dwight, the bookseller's, or Shibb, the auctioneer's, was never allowed an inch beyond the threshold, and, however weighty the package, or miscellaneous its contents, the old biblomaniac would drag it in himself. Tradesmen never came to the house, for he himself bought in the shops and prepared his food, and the postman, when he brought a rare letter, knew better than to knock or ring. He would slip it under the door, and the old man might or might not pick it up. Whichever he did, it was all one in the result, for the letter was never opened. After his death a letter from Quaritch, London, dated five years before, was found, offering him a four-figure sum for

a unique Bible known to be in his possession. Sir Redmond Barry bought the treasure for a song at the sale.

His very bed supported books; the table on which he took his spare meals was partly covered with them, and the seat he generally favoured in preference to the one chair to be discovered on the premises was a low pile of some folios bound in the sturdy fashion past generations were wont to entomb their Dryas-dusts. He lived in his books, and died among them.

His name was, as the boy knew it first, William Dillon, and he told it to the schoolboy in the rainy duskiness of a December evening. The boy had stolen in by the back way to say good-bye before leaving for up-country to spend his Christmas holidays. And the old man, for the first time and the last time, welcomed him with softness of voice. Usually he had but one tone, the raucous surliness of the hater of the human.

"So you are going before my time comes, lad?"

"Sir?" for the boy did not understand the allusion.

"My time is soon now. Johnny Fawkner's

gone, and I said I would not be long after him!"

"Did you know Mr. Fawkner, sir? I never heard you speak of him before!"

"Know him? Of course! It was he who helped me in Hobart Town after my bolt from the gang."

The boy listened. The old man had told a hundred times of the Colonial System in the brave days of old, but in all his narratives he had sought to convey that his knowledge was that only of the student and the observer. That he had owned a personal interest in the System flashed into the boy's mind.

"Do you not hear, you whelp! Did you hear me use the word gang?"

He was lying on his bed. Between his body and the wall were books, and books were at his feet. As he spoke he, vexed, half-rose, and in the petulance of his movement thrust some of the volumes to the floor, or rather upon other books.

The boy stooped to pick them up.

"Stop!" roared the old man, with an accent as of near thunder. "Stop! How dare you touch it!"

The lad held in his hand a small book,

elegantly bound in calf, with rich toolings and deep gilt edges. It was the first he had picked up. Before he could answer the old man spoke again.

"Give it to me, you young rascal! Is that how you treat me? But why should you be different? You're all alike—you men, women, and children—traitors all, spies all!" He snatched the book and thrust it between the laps of his open vest, and cursed the boy again.

The lad grew indignant, though his awe of the old fellow was such as to prevent his uttering his feelings with the characteristic rudeness of the "young colonial." All he cared to say was: "I'm no traitor or spy! I don't know what the book is, and I don't want to know. I'm off now, so good-night!"

The rumble gave place to a strange pleading.

"Don't go, lad; don't. I was too sharp. And don't mind me, for my time is very close, very close!" He paused, and a gasping sigh parted the gathering darkness, and thrilled the lad fearsomely.

"My time's coming close, and there's no one to do justice to—to——"

"To whom?" the lad ventured to ask at last.

His temper changed once more. "Why do

you ask? Do you want to give me up like that damned jade did, and get the reward?" And then the insane suspiciousness fled again before his need for human sympathy, and he held out the hand which clasped the book to the boy.

"Here—take it! I'll trust you. Open and read. Strike a light first!"

The lad, unwillingly enough, obeyed. He had never been with the old man after nightfall, and this evening there was an unusual aspect of wildness and uncanniness about him. But his curiosity overcame his trepidation, and held him to the spot. He lit the candle in a wall-sconce, which was the sole light-giving appliance of the room, and by its flickering proceeded to read the contents of the volume.

"Aloud!" whispered the old man. And aloud the boy read the first page—an "absconding notice," cut, as an appended note in manuscript testified, from a *Sydney Gazette*. The notice was as follows :—

Principal Superintendent of Convicts' Office.

SYDNEY, *May* 17, 182–.

THE undermentioned Prisoners, having absented themselves from their respective Employments, and some of them at large with false Certificates, all

Constables and others are hereby required to use their utmost exertions in lodging them in safe custody.

Any person harbouring, concealing, or maintaining any of the said absentees will be prosecuted for the offence.

(Signed) F. A. HELY, J.P.,
Principal Superintendent.

A list of the absconders followed, some thirty or forty, and the boy was reading it down. "Go down to the 'S's'!" interrupted the old man, and read what you see. Third of the "S's" the boy read out the particulars of William Shovey.

"Shovey—William, *Henry Porcher*, labourer, 19, Dublin, 5 ft. 5½ in., chestnut eyes, brown hair, brown complexion, from No. 9 Iron Gang."

"Who's William Shovey?" cried the terrible old man. He beat his hairy breast with savage irritation. "Who's Shovey, William? Say, you whelp, say! Don't stand there like a fool, but answer."

"You are!" the boy replied, startled with sudden prescience.

"Yes, I am!—I *am* William Shovey, and I don't care who knows it now, for my time is coming soon! You know it now, and Johnny Fawkner did, and you're the only two in all Victoria who know it. But I don't care now.

I'll advertise it in the *Age* to-morrow and the *Argus* that I'm William Shovey—ha, ha!"—the misery of that laughter!—"that would be funny, wouldn't it, to advertise oneself as an absconder? But, —— you, go on! See what's on the next page!"

Then the boy read this:—

No. 3/759

By His Excellency Sir Thomas Brisbane, K.C.B., Captain-General and Governor-in-Chief in and over the Territory of New South Wales and its Dependencies, etc., etc., etc.

THE INDENT having been examined, THIS CERTIFIES *seven* years have elapsed since sentence of Transportation for that Term was passed on *William Dillon at Essex Q.S* 18 *October* 181–, and who arrived by the ship *Surry* (2) in the year 181–. SAID *William Dillon* is therefore restored to all the Rights of a Free Subject.

Description as per other side.

GIVEN under my hand at Government House, Sydney,

This *sixteenth* day of *February* in the year of our Lord One thousand eight hundred and Twenty.

(Sd.) THO. BRISBANE.

REGISTERED IN THE COLONIAL SECRETARY'S OFFICE.

(Sd.) F. GOULBURN, *Colonial Secretary.*

Sept. 20. 182–. *T.R.*

Oct. 11. 182–. *T.K.*

On the back of the document—it was pasted on a guard so that the endorsement could be read easily—were Dillon's particulars :—

Dillon, William, Surry (2), *Labourer*, 20, *Cork*, 5 *ft.* 6 *in., hazel eyes, brown hair, dark complexion. Tattooed anchor on right forearm.*

"And who's Dillon?" questioned the ex-convict. "Who's Dillon, whelp?"

"You are, I suppose. But I won't stop here to be called whelp." The youngster turned to go.

"Don't go, boy! You'll be sorry when you know my time's come. I won't call you whelp again. But who's Dillon?"

"If you are not, I don't know."

"But if I'm Dillon, of the *Surry Second*, how is it I'm Shovey, of the *Henry Porcher*?"

The boy was beginning to know the System, and so he fired a shot which was not altogether a random one.

"You stole Dillon's certificate of freedom when you bolted!"

It was as though the old man had been trying an experiment, the result of which was destructive to himself. He flamed into mad violence of speech and gesture, and denounced the boy.

"Like all the rest, traitors and spies! You use the knowledge you get from me to convict me. Damn you! You piece things together to put me away! If you can make me out to be Shovey, free on a false certificate, others can, the police can, the judge can!"

But the boy, angered as well as alarmed at the man's eccentricity, stopped to hear no more. He passed out, and never saw Dillon, otherwise Shovey, again.

But ten days afterwards there came to his father's address a manuscript, which, in feeble scrawl, on blue paper, made the ex-convict's peace.

* * * *

"You should not have left me that night, my boy. You should have put up with my nonsense. For I was mad.

"But, as you went away, don't come back. You offended me by going, and I never forgive an offence.

"But I will tell you now that I am Shovey, and that *I did steal* Dillon's certificate of freedom. I tell you so that in twenty years' time you can tell others. Not under twenty years—that will see the last of Dillon. For Dillon is still alive. Every week a letter comes to me

in care of Dwight, from Gleadow, the solicitor in Launceston, which tells me whether he is alive or dead. He was alive last week.

"All along I have meant to do him justice. But he has life-sentence after life-sentence, and I could not do him good. Gleadow has tried for me, but as I did not tell Gleadow all the truth, he could do nothing. All I could do was to pay a warder at Port Arthur to give him tobacco frequently. I don't know whether the warder gave him all I paid for. But I do know that once some of the stuff was found upon him, and he got twenty lashes.

"Yes, Dillon's alive, and he will outlive me. And, if he does, he will have every penny I possess. All will be sold, and I will leave such papers—they are ready now—that surely the Tasmanian Government will grant him release.

"He shall have wealth and ease at the last. *My* money shall give him both. It is a fair exchange—my gold for his freedom.

"It was in 1819 that I first knew Dillon. We were in the Parramatta Road iron-gang together. He was a softy then, did his work as well as he could to please the overseer, and being afraid of the rest of us, we put upon him. But he had his revenge.

"When he was freed, and the very day he got his certificate, he came down to the gang. Because he had pleased the overseer he let Dillon come near us and speak to us. Any other man would have been arrested. But Dillon spoke to us, and taunted us, and we could not say a word in reply.

"He held the certificate in his mawly, and he came near to each one of us and thrust it under our eyes. 'There,' he would say, 'you ain't got that! You're lags, and I'm a free man.' And we durst not say anything, though we were maddened at the thought of it.

"There were nineteen of us all told, and we were caged at night in the watch-house yard, George Street toll-bar. An open shed it was we were in, but 'twas better far than barracks—there wasn't a warder or a guard on the inside. From lock-up to rising we were left to ourselves. And the deviltry that went on then!

"But that night there was no deviltry; we were all too keen to discuss Dillon and his dirty trick in coming and insulting us. We were under Government and in irons, but 'twas no reason why we should be insulted. We had a little of men's feelings left, we said one to another, and we would not stand it.

"When we got our ration, instead of beginning the devils' row, as usual, we were quiet—so quiet that the sentry poked in his head and said he was sure we were a-brewing mischief. We told him we were all dog-tired, that was why, and he was satisfied.

"We talked and talked what we should do to Dillon, and at last we decided to steal his paper. But who should steal it ?—that was the question.

"Some one said we should fight for it. We were nine couples and a single, and the couples should fight; each two men against another two, and the winners should fight one another. At the end of the first round the bye-man should be taken into the lot, and some one else should stand out. So for the third round and till the last. And the victor in the last ties should fight the bye-man, and the best man of the two should be helped to make a bolt of it, so that he might steal Dillon's certificate.

"It was a good idea, we agreed, and a happy way of spending Sunday. For the next day was Sunday, and not being in barracks we were not mustered for church; we would be mustered at morning ration, and that was all. So we could have the day for sparring, and the winner could bolt at night.

"We slept quiet that night, and the sentry told the overseer who mustered us that he was sure there was devilment afoot, and the overseer sent down to the Military Barracks for another sentry. That did not trouble us.

"At nine o'clock we paired off. And at half-past nine I had put my man down; he was older than I, but knew more about sparring, and our battle was the longest.

"At ten o'clock we drew fresh lots, and I was fortunate enough to stand out the third round. That was one freedom, I am sure, that resting. The others went at it, and by this time the news had spread, and numbers of persons, some on their way to church, stopped to peer through the half-opened gates; some gave the sentries a dump a-head to come inside and watch us closely.

"In the fourth round I was drawn, but my man was soon done up, for he had fought all through, and then I had to fight the bye-man. It was awful, that tussle, for he was nearly my own age and strength. But I knew a trick which threw him, and when his head fell on the cobbles, it dazed him, and he could not come up to time. Then the persons in the yard made a subscription for me, and gave me two

dollars and five dumps.[1] But the sentries took half.

"That night I bolted. I was helped over the wall at the rear where there were no sentries, by some of the gang. The others were making the customary row, quarrelling and fighting among themselves, so as to deceive the guards."

* * * *

Here Shovey's manuscript broke off. He caused it to be left at the boy's home a day or two before he died—by whom was not known. He must have felt that "his time was coming," and penned the narrative perhaps to facilitate the doing of tardy justice to—his victim.

The boy thought the story was ended, when, on showing the papers to his elders, inquiries were made, and it was found that Dillon had died at Port Arthur on the eve of that Christmas which had been Shovey's last.

Years afterwards, however, he heard from one who knew both men, the sequel of the escape.

"Shovey did not tell you the whole of the circumstances preliminary to his bolt. He omitted one most material particular.

[1] The "dump" was worth 1*s.* 3*d.* currency. The "holey dollar," 5*s.*

"That was that he was to return and show the others of the gang the stolen certificate."

"What good could that do them?"

"None. But it would prove to them that Shovey had carried out the agreement on which alone they had helped him to escape; for which they received punishment. They were, every man Jack of them, flogged for not informing the guard. Well, Shovey did not return, and as their notion had been less to free Shovey than to punish Dillon, they felt betrayed, and vowed the convict oath to revenge themselves upon him. And, somehow or other, in that mysterious way in which intelligence spread in the old days, among the whole penal population, Shovey learnt of their resolve."

"But how did he steal the certificate?"

"There was at that time in Sussex Street, Sydney, an inn, notorious for being the resort of absconders. Why the watch left it undisturbed for so many years would be a puzzle, if it were not known that they were always bribable. To this place, Shovey went, and being a likely fellow—that is, likely to pay if not recaptured—was aided in his design to escape to Van Diemen's Land. He would have gone without attempting to steal the certificate from Dillon

but the landlord of the 'public'—influenced by the Freemasonry of scoundrelism—swore that if he did not commit the theft, he would not only not assist him to leave the colony, but would hand him over to the police.

"Well, he stole the certificate. A girl was kept at the public-house to act as a decoy-duck, and, by her wiles, Dillon was drawn to the place. Necessarily he had his certificate with him; and it was the easiest mode to hocus the man, and rob him of his 'papers.' You see, Dillon was not *likely*; he intended, if he could, to remain 'square,' and the publican, who was also a 'fence,' hoped to make a decent profit from Shovey.

"Shovey got off with the certificate to Hobart Town. There, a few pricks with the needle and a little gunpowder made him tally with Dillon's description. Young Johnny Fawkner, believing him to be Dillon, helped him to work.

"He did well for a year or two. Then, one day, there turned up, the woman.

"Dillon had been flung out into the street after the theft, hocussed, drunk. At a word from the publican, the watch obligingly removed him to the cells, and next day (as a newly-freed prisoner unworthy of freedom

because he had lost his papers)—these were but Alexander Berry's words—he was awarded twelve months' gang-work. What wonder he was desperate? What wonder he now committed crimes? Before the twelve months were expired he was under sentence for life.

"Then the woman relented, she knew that others of No. 9 Gang had brooded over Shovey's treachery themselves, as they regarded it, and were eager to avenge it. They thought nothing of the wrong to Dillon; what they resented was the fancied wrong to themselves. The girl, repentant of her share for Dillon's fate, wanted to do Dillon justice. The gangers wanted to punish Shovey.

"In some way or other a few of the gangers commanded money, and sent the girl over to Van Diemen's Land.

"And there, one day in Campbell Street, she accused Shovey of being at large on a false certificate. She would not leave him till she procured his arrest then and there.

* * * *

"He was brought up on suspicion of being an absconder.

"He was stripped to his waist in court—the woman was present—and his 'marks' compared

with the certificate. 'They tallied fairly,' the magistrate said.

"Then the measuring-rod was brought, and his height was taken. 'It was near enough,' the magistrate considered.

"The woman asked the Bench to order a searching of the *Sydney Gazette*. 'The file was defective,' pronounced the magistrate.

"'What can I do to prove, your Worship, this man is William Shovey, bolter—not William Dillon, free by servitude? I'll stake my life it is him!' cried the woman.

"The Bench misunderstood—possibly.

"'Well, if you take your life, I may consider your statement proved!' said the Bench.

"The woman looked stupidly round the court-room. By ill-luck, an officer of the garrison was one of the visitors, and, being privileged, he had seated himself within the rails. For comfort's sake, he had unhooked his sword and had placed it on the table in front of him.

"In a second, the girl had rushed forward, had withdrawn the glittering blade, and before one individual of the startled, horrified court could lift a finger to stop the action, had slashed her throat.

"As the blood gurgled from the gash, she

gasped an echo of his words: 'You—believe—now!'"

* * * *

"There is no knowing what a woman will do when a thing becomes a matter of conscience. But she was a fool to back her word in that fashion. She ought to have bribed the magistrate with a larger sum than that which Shovey—otherwise Dillon—had paid him."

"Do you mean——"

"That Shovey bribed the Bench?"

That was his story. And we know magistrates were not unbribable in those days.

PRICE WARUNG.

JOHN PRICE'S BAR OF STEEL

THE sea-breeze fanned the symmetrical stems of the giant Araucaria transplanted by Colonel Foveaux to the front of Government Cottage, and swept from its fronds a chord or two of the music which the undisturbed centuries had there garnered. The nearer face of Mount Pitt, alpine in its solitude, was dazzling in the pallor of a South Sea moon; the blue of the ocean lay intersected with broad, fan-like beams of pearly radiance. It was such a night as poets dream of and delight in, and, in other climes, as the nightingale sings to the listening rose; such a night as, in this newest clime, John Price enjoyed to the utmost.

* * * *

A born captain of men, and knowing the seamy side of human nature, as (to the evil Deities' sorrow) few men who have visited these

colonies have done, he was so constituted as to intensely enjoy every form of physical beauty. In the midst of any scenic splendour, or in the presence of finely-proportioned man, convicted or not, or beautiful women, he would forget even to fix his eyeglass ; and the hard grey of his eyes would lose that dreadful faculty of penetration in which consisted the main source of his power over the convict creature and the newer penal official. And when John Price's face lost the use of the stony stare of the crystal disc, and the metallic keenness of the unveiled eye, then John Price was not himself.

There were frequent moments when he was not himself. Take any of the sparse convict survivors of the Old Régime, or any of the scarcely more numerous representatives of the subordinate Penal Officialdom, and they would deny this. They would assert that John Price was never aught but himself—that is to say, the sternest of disciplinarians, the most sceptical of moralists, the most saturnine of humorists, and the most exquisite of torturers. That drawing of him is about as true in perspective as that other picture limned by the partial hand of superior officers and of personal friends, in which the figure of the Commandant stands

clothed with a majesty of character little short, considering his temptations, of saintliness. John Price was neither a saint, nor yet of that high degree among demons which would entitle him to a shout of "Hail, brother!" from the sovereign and princes of the damned on his entrance into the Nether World. He was, truly, a many-sided man, the majority of whose facets were, unfortunately for himself, shaped by the planing-steel of the System. The System put under its knife the material which, under other conditions, wielded as a sword against the nation's enemies, would have formed a general of inspired audacity, a leader of dauntless courage, and an administrator of unerring prescience. But—the Fates were just! If there was scarcely a convict whom the System and the Régime did not spoil more or less, neither did they spare the officials. And as John Price, from his varied service in three colonies, was the instrument of contamination to more destinies than was any other administrator, it was only to be expected that the loss he personally suffered should have exceeded that of all other servants of the System. The life which might have ended at the doors of Westminster Abbey was miserably let out by a felon's hand on

Williamstown Pier. He whom the System created, died by the System. Which was justice according to the System.

* * * *

On this night, when Despair, throned imperially in her realm of Norfolk Island, decked herself with the effulgence of Heaven in mockery of the twelve hundred kindred mortals who sweated terror-drops beneath their stamped blankets, or in the embrace of fetters which they nursed tenderly so that the iron should not enter too deeply at night into the wounds it had punctured during the day; on this night, John Price, Civil Commandant, passed, with a guest, from his dining-room to the verandah, and gazed on the glory.

He thrust the less-known facets of his character into the view of his guest.

"A heavenly evening," he said; "I never saw a finer."

"Nor I!" was the answer.

They exchanged no other word. Each steeped himself in the rapture of the moment, and forgot his companion. Price gazed in the direction of Phillip Island, his visitor to the zenith.

Then a child's voice broke the silence. A

tiny, white-gowned figure glided out the hall doorway, and called its father.

"Fa'ver! Where is you, fa'ver?"

"Here, sonnie. But, fie! Not in bed yet?"

The youngster trots on his naked feet half the length of the verandah, and, at his father's side, holds out his hands so that he might be lifted up.

"I t'udn't do to bed, fa'ver, not wi'out saying my new prayer."

"A new prayer!"

The stern Commandant stoops and gathers the little one within his arms. The guest thinks if he were the father he would have echoed the words ashamedly, for there is something discrepant between the position of an absolute ruler of twelve hundred slaves and the function of a father listening to the lisping of an infant's benison. Not so, thinks John Price. With all his faults, he did not fear God, man, nor devil, and it is only the coward who insincerely gives heed to another's opinions. The whole world might have stood by, and John Price would have done just the same.

"Ees, a new prayer, fa'ver! Danny teached it me, an' I isn't to tell on'y you, fa'ver."

"All right, little man, go on."

The child slipped from the strong grasp, and knelt on the bare verandah boards.

"You believe in training up a child in the way he should go, even if it isn't your way, eh, Price?" chuckled the guest.

The Civil Commandant, though Dr. Hampton was his official superior for the time being (inasmuch as that Lesser Providence to forty thousand souls, the Governor of Van Demonia, had intrusted to the ex-convict-ship-surgeon the potential duty of reporting on the "moral state of Norfolk Island"), imperiously hushed him into silence.

"I believe in religion," he said, "for children and transports."

And the Doctor good-humouredly—for Price was a useful official—accepted the snub, with a rejoinder,—

"Who, after all, are only children of a larger growth. They've to be fed, and put to bed, and whipped and locked up like children. But I'm interrupting—go on, my little boy!"

"I's not you's 'ittle boy—I's fa'ver's—isn't I, fa'ver?"

"Yes, yes! But say your prayers, sonnie! You'll get cold here. Hadn't you better say them to mamma or nurse, inside?"

"No, fa'ver, for Danny tol' me to say my new pwayer to you wery ownself, fa'ver."

"Well, well, go on!"

* * * *

The child whispered the Lord's Prayer. His little head, curl-crowned, was reverently bent above his pressed palms.

After the one prayer, which has been the voice of all men in all the ages of Christendom, he whispered his—

> "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
> Look 'pon 'ittle chil';"

and thereafter, his piping struggling with drowsiness, his—

"God b'ess fa'ver, mu'ver, 'ittle sister, Sir John Fwan-in, where's he ever is, an' Lady Fwan-in, an' all—dear fr'ens——" The curls, burdened by sleep, fell upon the loosened hands, and the childish accents dropped.

* * * *

The father stooped to lift the boy, when Hampton, curious, said loudly,—

"You haven't said your new prayer, my little man!"

The child, aroused, rubbed his knuckles into his eyes, and murmured a response.

"Oh, no—I's a-forgettin'. I'll say it now, fa'ver!"

He slipped again to the floor, and, putting himself once more into the posture of prayer, breathed, with a palpable reverence which made the words doubly terrible,—

"God, p'ease damn John Price!"

* * * *

It's a toss-up who developed a more refined capacity for cruelty—John Price or some of the transports whom John Price trained.

* * * *

When Dr. Hampton was Governor of Western Australia he was accustomed to remark that never had he known or heard of John Price flinching, except on two occasions. The first was on a certain day in Tasmania, whose history we have yet to tell. The second was on this night.

The father shrank visibly as the child's voice breathed its innocent malediction. The pallor of his face was not that of the moonlight alone.

"Danny—taught—you—to say that?" he questioned the laddie.

But the child's head pressed against his knees in slumber. The father gathered the boy into

his arms, and carried him into the house. As he placed the little fellow in his cot he paused, battled with himself for a moment as to whether he *could* touch those lips which had emitted so poignant a sting, and then, stooping, kissed the rich redness of their curves and dimples.

The child, semi-roused, stirred, and murmured caressingly, "Fa'ver!"

* * * *

"What are you going to do with the pris'ner who put him up to saying that?" questioned Hampton, as the Commandant came forth again to the verandah.

"Wait!"

"Why?"

"Because I can't punish the scoundrel now without confronting him with the child. Doing that would fix the—the—thing in the little cove's mind, and would help him to remember it. The words will slip away from his recollection if I do nothing to impress them upon him. Besides——"

"What?"

"To reveal to the pris'ner that he has——"

He paused again.

"Hurt you?" suggested Hampton, with that

delicate malevolence, like a feline claw-scratch, which was one of his characteristics.

"If you like—sir!" Price was compelled to remind himself the doctor was not only his superior, but his guest. "To let him know that he has hurt me—as you say—would be to incite every servant I have to play me the same trick. Don't you know, Doctor, with all your experience of pris'ners, that the way to break 'em of a trick or practice not expressly prohibited by regulation is to say nothing about it? And that if you punish 'm for it, you'll give it an increased importance in their eyes?"

As an administrator in a large way, and truly meriting Mr. Gladstone's encomium that "he was thoroughly qualified for the most responsible offices in connection with convict discipline," Hampton was accustomed to consider himself John Price's superior, but he deferred to the Civil Commandant in all matters of precise knowledge. He said so now, and not so much fearful that Price would be excited to an unusual exercise of magnanimity, as curious as to the way he should punish the convict who had invented this newest devil's trick, asked the Commandant, "Was he prepared to overlook the matter?"

"I said I would wait," replied Price.

* * * *

All things come to the man who waits.

Daniel Duncan, lifer, per *Westmoreland*, was one of the four men allowed by Grace of the Authorities to the Commandant for domestic service. He had been selected by the previous Commandant, and Price had retained him in the entourage of Government Cottage till he had seen whether he could be replaced by a more deserving man—that is to say, in the language of the System, a man who was likely to be more useful in the house.

Unfortunately for Danny, such a man was not long in presenting himself to the Commandant's august notice. Somebody or other, who was so contemptible a creature in the keen eyes of the Lords of Evil as to be awarded by them a mere trifle of seven years' confinement amid the beauties of the island, was discovered to possess a pretty faculty for artistic gardening. He had suggested one or two striking means of improving the view from the Cottage, and, as the System was always anxious to improve upon Nature, he was to be granted a chance of gilding refined gold, by being told off to

reduce the tangled exquisiteness of the pine-glades, and the honeyed sweetness of the spice-land, to the order so beloved of Penal Officialdom.

Now, Order is a very fine thing, and, as a vile body on which the Régime had performed countless experiments, with the object of instilling a sense of orderliness into his soul, Daniel Duncan should have been appreciative of Mr. Price's motive in superseding him by the other prisoner. But even so admirably-devised a plan of morality, as was comprised in the Transportation System, could not eradicate from Duncan's nature that tendency towards selfishness which the less pious surroundings of his youth had encouraged. Instead of meeting Mr. Price half-way, so to speak, and welcoming his relegation to the gaol-cell as an opportunity for enjoying that self-communion which is so essential to the culture of good character, he resented his removal. And, resenting it, had directed the innocence of the Commandant's little child into the channel of cursing. Of course it was not prudent of Danny to act in this fashion, but wherever, since the epoch of Eden, did splenetic man act prudently?

He knew it was imprudent, and he knew,

moreover, that it was damnable to teach child lips to syllable imprecations. And with all his knowledge, he risked the consequences of the imprudence for the sake of the damnableness. Which was a corollary of the System.

* * * *

He knew it was the beginning of the consequences when, standing on the verandah steps, the morning after the night, the Commandant said smilingly: "Make the most of your last day, Duncan! You go into the gaol-gang tomorrow."

The prisoner looked defiantly into the disc of unrimmed glass—and trembled as he saluted.

"Yes, sir!"

"And, Duncan——"

"Sir!"

"You are fond of children, Duncan?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, as you have, I believe, served the Cottage pretty well, you shall have one indulgence, Duncan—the youngsters shall come over sometimes. But no more prayers, Duncan; no more prayers."

Duncan, though the world was singing in its warm bath of sunlight, shivered again, and

bowed his head over the mattock. He regretted his imprudence now.

* * * *

Three days later the main guard—the gaol—turned out as Dr. Hampton and the Commandant arrived to inspect.

"Muster!" ordered the Civil Commandant, speaking to Assistant-Superintendent Tuff.

The occupants of the gaol, saving those waiting trial, who were doubly-ironed in the cells, were ranged in the corridor.

The authorities intended to "re-form the gangs" that day, and "out" labour had ceased for the time being, a circumstance which was unpalatable to Tuff and disastrous to Danny Duncan. For the gaol-men were usually mustered by their gangs, and Tuff's special lot for muster could be comprehended by a glance, and he could rattle off the names from the muster-book as though he were reading them. Read them he could not, unless they were written in text-hand. With forty men, however, to call over, this mechanical process was impossible, and he could not read the names from the roll, because the entries were made in a running hand.

"Muster!" repeated the Civil Commandant.

Tuff, saluting in deprecatory tones, informed their Honours that "the names wasn't large 'nuff for his weak eyes to see, yer Honours."

"Weak eyes!" echoed the Commandant. "I didn't know you had weak eyes."

"Yes, sir! But they're jest come on, sir! They'll be better shortly, sir!" And Tuff vowed to himself that he would give some of the hospital rations of rum and tobacco to some convict to coach him in reading "small-hand." "Be better shortly, sir. An' shall one of the men read over, sir?"

The Commandant took no notice of the question, but pursued his motive of inquiry.

"Just come on, has the weakness! Now, how weak are they? Look at Duncan there, Duncan 41—392, Duncan of the *Westmoreland.* Can you see that bar of steel—a dangerous weapon specially prohibited by regulation to be in the possession of pris'ners—which he has?"

Tuff looks stupidly at Duncan; Duncan regards himself as stupidly; there is a forward craning of necks down the line, as crows ranged on a rock might protrude their beaks to watch the turning of a living substance into carrion.

For a second there is nothing to be seen by any one; Duncan's hands are, as per regulation, clapped at his sides. Where, what, can be the bar of steel?

The Civil Commandant, John Price, steps forward, pauses an instant to adjust his eye-glass, and with his index-finger touched the fatal object.

"Present this pris'ner after muster for having in his possession a dangerous weapon, and report yourself to the Doctor forthwith, Mr. Tuff, in order to have that weakness remedied. It's time something was done to correct your sight when you allow pris'ners—and gaol-gangers above all others—to carry bars of steel on their persons. Give me the book!"

* * * *

The muster began, proceeded, ended. And then Duncan, Daniel, No. 41—392, per *Westmoreland*, was presented at Court. Assistant-Superintendent Tuff presented, and Civil Commandant John Price, acting as magistrate, presided. And Dr. Hampton, as an interested spectator, was accommodated with a seat.

"Defence, pris'ner?" demanded the Court. "What d'ye say?"

"Only that your boy brought it me. I was a-making him sails for his toy-boat when you transferred me, sir, and the little chap, when he see me yesterday, brought it me, sir, to finish 'em. From his mammy, he said, sir."

"You admit another offence as well? Holding communication with free person's children is illegal, and you know it. But we'll leave that to another day. No other defence?"

The prisoner held his breath. So did all the Court, save the Commandant and Dr. Hampton. They breathed easily enough, you may depend. Only a Secretary of State could affect their respiration.

"Then fifty lashes—and the wet quarry [1] for six months—and the article to be forfeited. May I ask your opinion, sir?"

"A very proper sentence in my judgment," approved the inspecting officer. "Very!"

And he gazed steadily into the eye-glass,

[1] WET QUARRY.—The work in the quarry was so destructive to the gangers' clothes that, in the mercy of the System, they were permitted a second or working suit made of condemned blankets! The comfort and protection afforded by clothes composed of materials too rotten to be served out to a Norfolk Island dormitory may be inferred, but not valued!

and saw in the steely eyes an interpretation of the sentence which expressed his own mind. John Price had waited only three days.

* * * *

Fame is a product of accident. So is infamy.

But it is questionable whether it was altogether by accident that Danny Duncan, per *Westmoreland*, became possessed of that common sewing-needle—size No. 2.

The Bullet of the Fated Ten

A TALE OF THE RING

I.—AT THREE O'CLOCK P.M.

THIRTY-TWO feet by twenty-two feet. And one hundred and ten men in the room.

This was cell No. 1.

Thirty-two feet by twenty-two feet. And one hundred and twelve men herded therein. This was cell No. 2.

There were two other "cells" in the old Sydney gaol, but in point of accommodation they were luxury itself compared with Nos. 1 and 2.

They were respectively, the "Fines" ward, where the *detinues* who declined to recognise the right of His Majesty's magistracy to impound their cash, numbered on the average

about thirty, which thirty revelled in the ample space of 27 by 20 feet ; and the women's ward.

This last was of the spacious capacity of 27 by 22 feet, and at the time of our story accommodated forty women and five children.

There had been occasions when it had sheltered sixty adults, but times, in the criminal business of the day, were slack in feminine offences, and the human contents only equalled forty-two. (*Five children under twelve counted, in the matter of rations and allowances, for clothing and coffins, as two adults.*)

To keep the inhabitants of this populous centre in order five soldiers garrisoned it in the day, and six at night. And all the available space being taken up by the "cells" and yards, it necessarily followed that there was no guard-room attached to the structure. "Main guard" contributed the gaol garrison.

Now these things are necessary to be remembered, else our story would require a preliminary dissertation which should incorporate a whole code of regulations.

Let the size of the gaol, its populousness and the paucity of its garrison speak, and nothing further is necessary to show that that dreadful ballot, in the casting of which ten condemned

used the silver bullet of "The Ring," need not have taken place at all.

That was the sting of the episode to the survivor of the group. The whole of the dread business was needless. Why, what use to ballot so that one should escape when the Ten together could have conquered the guard and freed the men of No. 1 and the "Fines"? That was the problem that vexed him. You see that none of the Ten knew it would have been so easy to take the gaol. It was only a stone's throw from the guard-house on Charlotte Place, but still the assault, if successful for five minutes, would have been successful all through. The pity o' it! To think of nine lives dropped through the gallows door, when no greater expense need have been gone to than the sacrifice of half a dozen soldiers! Why, 'twas cruelly absurd to keep the Ten in ignorance of the possibilities! At best this is what the survivor reflects, years after, when he was a man of wealth and position, and when he told this story.

It was just after three o'clock when the Ten came into the yard, and that accounted for it all—for all the ignorance, all the muddle, and the loss of all nine lives.

At three o'clock all the male prisoners were locked up till six the next day, so that the women and children, who had been immured in their "black hole" all the livelong day, could take a brief two hours of exercise in the yard. There was but the one yard—when it was not the men's exercise yard, it was the women's; and when it was neither, it was the playground of the condemned. And there were ten condemned.

* * * *

The Fates were against them. They had landed from the Norfolk Island brig the last thing the previous day, and it was not thought necessary to take them to the gaol, but they had been confined to the cells in the new courthouse. Then the sessions had opened that morning, and by 2.15 the court had sympathetically postponed its luncheon, so as not to embarrass the military jury of five officers by too long a detention in the jury-room. His Honour, the Judge, had duly received the jury's pronouncement, had duly donned the skull-cap, had duly admonished them for their crime, and had duly ordered them to be hanged. And at 3.30 they were installed in His Majesty's gaol, with the knowledge that on the following

Monday the law's doom would be executed upon them. And this was Friday.

There had been no unseemliness of haste about the routine. But still it has to be said that the Fates were against the Ten. Could they have been polished off a little earlier, they would have been delivered at the gaol before the other business had left the yard, and they doubtless would have learnt all about the characteristics of the institution. Or had they been, as the custom usually was, deposited at the gaol for a few days pending trial, in like manner they would have mastered all the excellencies of the establishment. As it was, they knew nothing, or next to nothing, of the routine and local system. It was many years since the youngest in criminality had been in Sydney, and things had changed much in that time. They had had nothing to guide them as to their treatment, save what they knew of the Norfolk routine, and that was rigour itself. They could not conceive that so ill-arranged and so ill-disciplined was the Sydney Penitentiary that it would have been the easiest thing in the world for them to subjugate the establishment, and effect their escape. And, owing to the hour and manner of their arrival,

there was no one to tell them. This was, in the survivor's judgment, the most piteous thing of all. Could they but have known!

* * * *

These were the names and the descriptions, and the ships of the Ten.

Michael Pedder, *Asia* (1), 2506, aged 32, 5 ft. 4½ in., dark ruddy complexion, light brown hair, grey eyes, scar across nose, scar (new and fresh) on left side of forehead. (This is his description on the Norfolk Island cargo manifest.)

Jabez Blake, *Java*, 817, aged 25, 5 ft. 6 in., dark and freckled complexion, B J and cross on right arm, indistinct mark (something like a horse's head on his left), dark brown hair, light blue eyes, rather emaciated.

William Andrew Drummer, *Hercules* (2), 2278, age 55, 5 ft. 9 in., grey hair, two women, bird and barge inside lower left arm, woman, anchor and laurel inside lower right arm, bright hazel eyes, florid complexion.

Thomas Short, *Dungarvan Castle*, 244, age 19, 5 ft. 6½ in., pale, sallow complexion, brown hair, blue eyes, mermaid with comb and glass inside of left arm, fourth finger of left hand missing, old scar left side of neck.

Patrick McCarthy, *Isabella*, 1420, aged 24, 5 ft. 1 in., pock-pitted complexion, small scar under left collar-bone, mark of a burn on right jaw, black hair, hazel eyes, seven stars and anchor on lower left arm, P.M. on right wrist.

Thomas Lewis, *Eliza*, age 35, 5 ft. 3¾ in., C. W. A., and woman's bust, stag and mermaid on chest, ring on left little finger, sallow complexion, chestnut eyes, brown hair.

John Hanlay, *Rosslyn*, age 40, 5 ft. 6 in., freckled complexion, brown hair, dark brown eyes, nail of little finger disfigured.

John Clyde, 5156, *Marquis Hastings*, age 24, 4 ft. 1 in., L. W. on left arm above crucifix, L. W. on right arm below crucifix, fair hair, fair, florid, pock-pitted complexion.

Edmund Entmorth, *Phœnix*, 1431, 5 ft. 7 in., age 41, W M W M W M on each arm, dark ruddy complexion, brown hair, brown eyes, ankles iron chafed.

John Donnell, "Mangles," 777, age 32, 6 ft., brown complexion, dark eyes, dark hair, whited raised spot on lower part of right eye.

These were the Ten who went into the "Condemned" yard shortly after three of the clock on the Friday, and who came out—as we shall see.

II.—AS THE NIGHT FELL

ONE and each of the Ten was a mutineer, a mutineer of "The Hundred," the famous hundred, that had riven the authority of the Commandant (afterwards to be known as one of the most dashing settlers of Port Phillip) for the time being, as the sudden stroke of lightning rives the victimed tree.

Pedder was the ringleader, and the scar on his forehead, freshly healed, was his trophy from the fight. His description above given did not represent him with accuracy. He had much of the born leader in his features and in his gait. An intrepid brow and fearless eyes surmounted lineaments indicating powers of organization and command, but a defiance of society could be read in their lower contour. The soldiers had surrounded him, and it was in his pursuit that they had shot two of their own number. He had turned quickly; the two close upon his heels doubled with him, and the three at an angle to their former line of route, attracted the fire of the rear guard of his pursuers. While Pedder escaped, the two received the bullets intended for himself. He was

dreaded by the populace of the island, both feared and hated, for his very dauntlessness made him a greater devil than the rest. For him and such as he was the System had little responsibility. It had either to subjugate, or be subjugated, and as he had begun his career with crime, so he would end it with crime. The humaner instincts nearly always to be found, even in the twenty-fold perjurer and the thrice condemned murderer, were absent from his very nature, and even Maconochie would have found it impossible to have opened up a door to his heart save through a bullet.

Blake was a man of a different stamp; one of the weaklings of the island, who suffered agonies from the physical confinement, and greater agonies from the incessant whippings of conscience. He was one of those in whom the conscience never slept.

Drummer was the *doyen* of the group; but compared with others of the Ten he was an innocent. He was an early arrival at the island away back in the 'Nineties, and now that the 'Thirties were looming close ahead he was still an islander in thought, in fancy, and in feeling. Thirty-six years, save for an interregnum when the island was depopulated, were the years

which he had lived on the island (if his existence could be termed life). Transported as a boy, the deadening routine of island life have overlain all his impressions of an existence outside of the surf-bound "Paradise." And now here he was, once again in Sydney, no more a boy, but a man, aged in suffering and experience of the vilest sort, and he was in Sydney to be hanged.

"Mangles" Donnell was the giant of the party, of great strength physically, but as fickle as a child, save when subject to the stronger will of another. There was no crime to which he could not be forced, and there was no kindly deed which he would not do, give him but the means and the power, when influenced by men who knew him and who knew themselves.

As to the others, we are concerned with Short directly, and let the story tell something more of him than his description sheet.

* * * *

It was half-past three o'clock when the Ten were hustled into the yard. Because they were condemned, and not merely committed or sentenced to imprisonment or transportation, they would be granted the superior distinction of isolation from the occupants of Nos. 1 and 2

cells. As there was no other place for them to be confined, necessarily they had to deprive the women of those precious moments when they might breathe the air and see the sky, save through barred windows; and when the news went into the women's ward that there was to be no exercise that day, Saturday, or Sunday, there was shriekings of rage and grief. Few privileges indeed had the women, and to be deprived of their exercise-time added fresh pangs to the punishment of the virtuous—for there were virtuous among their number—and a new fury to the rebellion of the others.

There was a young mother there, nursing an infant at the breast. She had a toddler pulling at her gown, and the little thing, ill with the squalor and noisomeness of the place, had learned to look with instinctive pleasure at the prospect of the day's "outing." She had seen the locking up of the ordinary prisoners, and knew that the hour had arrived at which the women usually rushed pell-mell into the vacated yard. To-day, however, the little one saw instead of the wonted rush, a grouping of the women in angry knots, rapid and passionate gesticulation, and the making of a noise which terrified her.

"Mother, mother," it cried, burying its face in the mother's gown, "let me out; let me out."

"Not to-day, dearie," said the mother, a quiet Hawkesbury lass, incarcerated on a charge of petty theft. "Not to-day, dearie."

"Let me out, let me out," shrieked the child; and the other children—there were, as we have said, five in all the ward—took up the cry, "Let us out, let us out."

A virago who had by force of muscularity and temper risen to the proud position of monitress, and whose emoluments consisted in being allowed sugar in her tea, and two ounces of tobacco weekly, bade the mothers stop their youngsters' clatter, and shook one of the elder children. As might have been expected, this but increased the turmoil, and before many minutes had elapsed the *mêlée* became general. The mother of the child who had been shaken, whirled round and round in the scuffle, saved herself at last from falling by clasping the bar of a window looking upon the yard. She held herself up by it, the while the monitress was showering blows upon her, and shrieked out between the interstices of the bars to the doomed men.

"They say as ye're black Norfolkers. By

——, if yer was ye'd pull the whole gaol down. If yer was like some Norfolkers as I knows, ye wud I know. Ye deserve to be 'anged, 'cos yer keeps the women and kids from gettin' a mouthful of fresh air."

A further verbal onslaught was prevented by the monitress putting her hand before the woman's mouth.

"No, yer don't, my fine hussy. None o' that, or I'll get yer inter the stocks." The woman's voice was stilled and there was a lull in the storm, the scores of turbulent women waiting to see what would be the result of the monitress' assault upon the other.

The lull permitted to be heard another child's pleading. "I wish I could get out, mummy ; I wish I could get out." These words were distinctly heard by some of the condemned, who, curious at the disturbance, had clanked their iron legs and taken up a position beneath the window. "Why don't yer let the kinchins out. If we are black Norfolkers, what's the row?"

The monitress, now eager for something like change herself, bettered the example of the woman she had chastised. "Oh, my Jack Ketch beauties, ye're going to be turned off are ye. Well, I don't care how soon. Don't yer

know as we women can't get out 'o here till Monday. That's what you fellows do for us, is it? We's as lief be hanged ourselves as be kept in here for three days. An' if I were black Norfolkers I wouldn't stop here longer than it suited me."

Some faint glimpse of the truth was perceived by Pedder. He came from the centre of the yard to the wall and said, "What's that, missus? What do yer mean by that?"

But the monitress now bethought herself. Was she not after all something of an official, and as such shared in official emoluments and privileges? Why should she risk the loss of sugar in her tea and her two ounces of tobacco by her precipitate desire to confide the fact of the insecurity of the gaol to some fellows who might, for all she knew, contain a likely informer or two among them?

"Oh," she said, "nothing. I don't mean nothing."

Pedder thought for a moment, and in that moment was convinced that the woman had in her first remarks said something which was not without importance to him and his mates. Very keen were the susceptibilites of men such as this ringleader, when they had been sharpened

upon the grindstone of necessity and the whetstone of deception. With a flash of intuition, he felt that if he could induce some woman to give him the hint, there was something to be done and something to be discovered. With a stroke of policy that amounted almost to inspiration, he felt that to get at the woman he must use the children.

"What's that about the kinchins?" he said. "Can't they get out?"

"No," growled the monitress, known as Slippy Sal. "We're all a-stuffed in 'ere till the scragger comes along for you fellows, and, please God, that won't be long."

"Ain't there any other yard?" asked Pedder.

"Only the stores, and we can't get in there. Until you fellers are topped off we've got to stay here, and the kiddies too."

"Well, that's 'ard," broke in Blake, "for the kiddies. Chuck 'em out 'ere, and we'll amoose em."

There was a laugh at this both inside the wall and outside. The soldier on guard at the gate of the condemned cell, and whose "go" had turned him from the enclosure, put his head into the trap-door, or spy hole, and interjected "Silence!"

Pedder clanked with his double irons towards the gates. "I say, Lobster," wheedlingly, "the wimmin in there are cussin' 'cos their kids can't git out. You ask the Governor to send them in here. Let the youngsters have the fresh air. We won't interfere."

The soldier looked wonderingly at Pedder, but he had little ones of his own, and again and again he had felt for the shrivelled little brats whose pallid faces and withered limbs had touched him to sympathy. So he deviated from the strict path of duty, and ringing his musket stock upon the stone flagging of the corridor, sent the convict lad who acted as messenger, and whom the signal had brought to the spot, to the office of the guard with a message.

Lieutenant Courtney appeared.

"What is it, Private Smith?" he questioned. Smith saluted and conveyed what he thought was the women's wish. He did not know, of course, that the women had expressed no specific wish, that he in reality was simply moving to carry out the idea that had framed itself in the cunning brain of Pedder. Courtney laughed, and went to the Governor, and as a consequence, within ten minutes the Hawkesbury girl, braced

with her couple of children and the other kinchins, were sent into the yard.

It was certainly an act of thoughtlessness to send in the woman, but the rigid system was often relaxed in little points such as that, without rhyme or reason. One injunction was laid upon her. She was not to speak to the men, but to keep herself in one corner, whilst the men were motioned by the officer to the opposite corner. Sentry Smith, moreover, was ordered to shorten his walk so that his eye might always be on the condemned group. If the gaoler gave a second thought to the matter at all, it was not to consider the possibilities of communication through the medium of the woman, but simply for her temporary protection.

The children with little nervous shrieks rushed about between the men's legs. In a minute or two the men had squatted in a semicircle on the stone floor by the further wall, and the children were leaping over their irons, being tossed pleasantly from one to another. The women who were in the ward crowded to the window to look at this pleasant sight, for it was pleasant, as it was unusual, this mateship. The grim faces of the men relaxed, and no one would have thought that one and all were under sen-

tence of a dreadful death. The children plucked the men's hair, tossed the caps of those who had head gear, and dangled and played with the chains that linked ankle and ankle. And the mother of the five-year-old toddler in the opposite corner stood and gazed. But while the children played, and the men smiled, Pedder was plotting, and he still was plotting as the night fell.

III.—AS THE MORNING ROSE

PEDDER plotted to such purpose, that when night fell, and Sentry Smith before being relieved, ordered the Hawkesbury woman and the children back, the little child took with her a bit of slate. It was a toy, she thought; it was a toy her mother thought; it was a toy the sentry thought. The child held it gleefully aloft so that all might see as she went through the doorway into the corridor. It was a bit of slate which had fallen from the overhanging roof of No. 1 cell. With the fragment of a bit which he had snapped off, Pedder had drawn a gallows and a man dangling from it. The whole he had encircled within a ring that seemed a frame.

Some of Pedder's colleagues looked upon the thing as rather a good joke; so did the Hawkesbury lass; so did Sentry Smith; but condemned man Blake, condemned man Drummer, and condemned man Clyde exchanged glances with one another and with Pedder, and the hearts of each leapt within them. Surely that would bring a "Ringer" to their aid. Some blankets were thrown into them by the soldier who relieved Smith, at 6 o'clock, their food was given to them at 6.30, and at 7 o'clock the officer of the night guard came in and tapped their irons, and wished them as he went out a good night and a happy hanging.

* * * *

Now the mutiny had been a "slant." The dashing Victorian squatter that was to be, had not been altogether a success as a Commandant, and it was felt both by himself and "others," the convicts being chief among the "others," that things under his rule would soon come to an end. He doubled guard, displayed keener activity in visiting the outlying posts, and in other ways prepared for an *emeute*. Pedder had got tired of things in general, and had organized that movement which was popularly known in Norfolk Island and Port Arthur as a "slant,"

that is, he had planned a murder or a mutiny on purpose to obtain a trial in Hobart or Sydney. The mutiny of The Hundred had resulted, and the "slant" had come off with promptitude. Half a dozen convicts had been killed and wounded, two soldiers had been killed by the soldiers themselves, two by the convicts, and several wounded. Altogether it was a great success, and now here there were waiting ten to be hanged.

* * * *

And now the ten were woke up on the Saturday morning by a gentleman who had profited by the "slant" to come to Sydney as a witness. He had heard of the Slate, and knew thereby that some at least would escape if they could.

There were always witnesses required and ofttimes a "slant" was arranged as much as anything else to give the witness a trip as well as the actual offender.

It was still dark, at four o'clock, when the witness appeared. With comparative noiselessness the door swung back, and the sentry let him in. Quietly, with cloth slippers on his feet, he went from one to another of the sleeping men and touched them. He named them all in turn

and bade each arise. The men were accustomed by long years of discipline and by special training for revolt and rebellion, for at the Island they had again and again gone through the trial of waking quickly and getting up noiselessly, so close was the possibility of escape always to their imagination. Each accordingly got up as his name was called, and wondered and waited. Only Pedder and Blake did not wonder. They had felt quite sure, instinctively as it were, that the bit of slate sent by the child's hand would spread rumour throughout the gaol, and in the indefinable and inexplicable way in which news circulated (even in the iron cells of Norfolk Island) would reach some one.

Now the man who had come into that yard at four o'clock in the morning was a "ringer," and several of the others were "ringers." He was a "fiver," the highest grade of any one present. Pedder was a "sevener," Blake was a "niner," Drummer and Donnell (enlisted for his great strength) were in the "novices." The others knew the "Ring" simply as every Norfolker knew it—a terrible institution to be dreaded and to be obeyed. The man who entered from the outside held a strap in his hand, and by a movement scarcely to be detected, but rather

imagined, he separated Pedder, Blake, Drummer, and Donnell from the others. Then each feeling his way in the blackness, grasped the strap, and they stood there with the link of union between them.

Drilled, as the others were, with as little noise as possible, each stooping as he revolved, so as to clasp his irons and prevent them from clanking, they turned their faces to the wall and waited, for what—they knew not.

In the *argot* of the "Ring" these fellows exchanged whispers. The "Outside" said, "Pedder, you are a 'sevener'?"

"Yes."

"Blake, you are a 'niner'?"

"Yes."

"Drummer, you are a 'novice'?"

"Yes."

"Donnell, you are a 'novice'?"

"Yes."

"Then in the name of 'the One' I bid you hold a session to decide which of you shall escape. Only the one can escape, and my orders are that the six who are not in the 'Ring' must be in the 'ballot.'"

Pedder murmured, "Where are your other credentials?"

"Right," said the "Outsider," the "Fiver."

"Right."

He passed the strap which he was holding from his right hand into his left, and produced something from his pocket. He pressed it into Pedder's hand. Pedder acknowledged its receipt by an exclamation which called forth a sharp "Hush!" from the "Outsider," for Pedder had uttered the words, "The Silver Bullet."

IV.—THE ANSWER TO THE SLATE

BLAKE shivered as he caught Pedder's whisper, "The Silver Bullet." Drummer and Donnell did not know the full significance of the words, but they were impressed at once, for now that their eyes had become used to the darkness, they saw that Pedder and Blake had bowed over the bullet. Nothing was a more singular weapon against the System than the employment the "Ring" gave to the capacity for reverence and obedience, which are inherent in almost every man, and nothing proved the "Ring's" diabolical character more clearly than the fact that the perverted moral sense of the society's founders did not seek to obliterate reverence and obedience but to distort them to

vile objects. But this is by the way. To the "Ring" the silver bullet was a message from the dreaded chief of the "Ring," "The One."

For all they knew, this man, who avowed himself as a "Fiver," might be "The One" himself. It had been suspected that "The One" had on occasions, in order to test the fidelity and veracity of the men in the lower circles, even included himself in the ranks of the "novices," and had worked his way up again to the eminence (but one degree short of his own dreadful pre-eminence) of "The Three."

Pedder and Blake stood silent, waiting for the next command. The "Outsider" took the bullet back and re-pocketed it. They knew, then, that they must obey him ; listened eagerly for his next words.

"Brothers," he said, "I found it impossible to communicate with you from the outside, until the bit of slate came to-night. I was in Court."

"Yes," interjected Blake, "and gave evidence against us."

"Of course. I could not do otherwise. But I am here now to save one o' yeh. The slate was passed round the women's ward, and then into the men's cells, as a good joke. That was clever of you, Pedder for of course you did it."

"Yes," said Pedder.

"And the men told the night-soldier of their cell, and I heard them telling; and then I knew that if that thing could come out, something could go in."

"I have been ordered to save one of you, and one only, because the opportunity is not good enough to save more of you."

"Which is it to be? Men out of the 'Ring' or in it?"

"The other six are to be in the ballot. Those are 'The One's' orders."

Each man drew a deep breath, but was silent. The greatness of the hope had arisen in each heart, for each knew thoroughly that could the one but be rescued, it would mean ultimate escape from the colony.

"Brothers," went on the "Fiver," "you must take the oath."

And the dread ceremony was gone through, so far as could be done in the brief space of time. Foot to foot, and forming a cross, with clasped hands, each whispered the oath, and each felt under that weird incantation that, while he would be true to his brothers, he would dare much to win the freedom which never seemed so sweet as when it was contrasted with the appalling tyranny that the

"Ring" exercised over even the most elevated of its members.

Foot to foot they chanted the oath, and then the "Fiver" released his hold on the strap and moved in circles round the others.

"You swear you'll be true men to the 'Ring' and your brothers and the Devil—the 'Ring's' lord and master—and that the ballot of the silver bullet shall be a true ballot, and not worked,[1] so the Devil keep you all."

And the four muttered, "The Devil keep us!" in response.

This was all that passed then.

Long pencils of light were already streaking the sky eastwards as the "Fiver" withdrew.

The door was opened noiselessly and closed as quietly.

By whom? Ah, that cannot be told now.

The four were left to hint to their colleagues of the condemned all they dared.

They had not asked when the ballot should be, or in what form it would take place. But those of the "Ring" knew that the traditions would be held sacred—if the term is not misused in this connection. They realized fully that when the hour came that the ballot should

[1] "Worked," "faked," or manipulated unfairly.

be, it would be ; and they could occupy themselves till then in dreaming, each for himself, of the ballot's result.

* * * *

About nine that morning the Hawkesbury lass was sent in again, with her children and the other "kinchins." And the youngsters gambolled as they had done the previous afternoon ; gambolled and played merrily in and out of the condemned group. But the condemned were only playmates at intervals, and one and all were discussing the problem, "Would the bullet fall to him ?"

V.—THE SUNDAY VIGIL

SATURDAY passed, and Sunday also, towards night. From all the cells, male and female, stories of blasphemy had arisen ; for the condemned could not be removed, of course, and the cells were stifling. Executions were frequent enough in old Sydney, but not for years had there been so heavy a batch of condemned, and usually those destined for the gallows were left in the yard with the other prisoners, who however were separated from them by a convict guard. The Ten were thus equally honoured

by their isolation, could they but have appreciated it.

They heard the yelling and the cries, and had no hesitation in ascribing it to the true reason. But they did not bother much as to how the others they had inconvenienced felt. Each was pondering as to the ballot.

The Protestant chaplain in the pastorage, St. Philip's, had called in on the Sunday, but he was over-worked and ill. The Ten were of two faiths, and the Roman Catholic priest would be with *his* people on the Monday early. Before that he could not come, because of the services which he had to hold twenty or thirty miles away. So, save for good Chaplain Couper's call, the Ten had been officially left to themselves, or, what to "nine" would be their last Sunday on earth. They had plain duff for dinner, however, and that was a consolation not without its sweetness: often of exquisite graciousness to *condamnés* in their last hours were the offices of the State!

One other break the Ten had. The children were clean-bibbed and petticoated, and had come up to the men with peculiar delight to sport their hebdomadal finery. The wearing of clean frocks and pinafores was one of kindly

Mrs. Macquarie's regulations, and the means for obeying being provided with the need for obedience, it had more than once kept the heart of a sainted mother sweet to give her child in what, in that squalid atmosphere, was a distinguished appearance.

The five-year-old daughter of the Cornstalker had touched Short on the arm to draw his attention to herself.

The man was sitting on the ground with his head bent between his knees, and almost to his chains. He was not brooding so much as dreaming of what the future might be supposing—but why suppose? Had he ever been lucky in life that luck should fall upon him now and he be cast for freedom by the ballot? He and the others not in the "Ring" knew the method of selection was by ballot, but how—they knew not that.

He shivered as the child touched him. Was it the message?

Looking up he saw the gleeful little face peering into his, and the heart within him throbbed painfully. If he could but be free—if the bullet would fall into his hand—ought he not, away in the newer scenes, be able to make a new home, even have children—such a child

as that whose orbs, tiny balls of light, looked steadily into his own gloomy eyes, curiously scanning the image therein represented.

"Look, Mis-ter Short," she said, in her piping treble—the Hawkesbury lass was not forgetful of her child's manners, even in her incarceration—"Mis-ter Short, look!"

The child held out her frock, with its frill of coarse embroidery. "I'se a clean f'ock!" and carolled lightly as she met an answering smile upon his face.

Then she turned her head, and he followed her movement, to catch her mother's eye by the corner near the gate. The mother, meeting his gaze, cast a suspicious glance towards the window, where half a dozen faces of the stronger women (they had beaten down their weaker sisters) were clustered. Watching carefully that she was not observed, she motioned with her head to Short, as though to direct him to look more closely at the child's frock. He did so, but did not at the instant perceive to what she referred. Then she called the child to her, and putting her baby for an instant (she had been walking up and down with it) on the ground, she placed the edges of the frock in such a manner that the little child held it as

if about to make a curtsey. Then a whispered injunction sent the child back.

Pedder's attention had by this time been drawn to this little bit of by-play, and with his wonted keenness saw in it more than lay on the surface. He closely followed the child's movements with his eyes, and saw almost as soon as Short himself did, to whom she had gone, that some letters or words were roughly marked out in sewing cotton upon the frock.

Rising slowly from his recumbent position, he put down another child which had come to him and took the little five-year-old in his arms, but, frightened at the repulsiveness of his face, she cried to go to Short, and would not remain still while Pedder examined the dress.

Once on the ground she flew from both Short and Pedder, and crying, went back to her mother. They did not know it, of course, but with her went also the hope of freedom, for all the fated gang. Pedder could not realize the significance of the message, but nevertheless he felt that something had been missed, and then with the spiteful temper of the illiterate, which always seeks to wreak upon others the penalty of its own blunders and misdeeds, he turned sharply upon Short, and struck him.

Short rising and aggrieved, too, that he could not know what was sewn on the frock, struck back at Pedder. The women in the ward who saw the encounter, cried out joyfully. It broke the monotony of the day, an occurrence of that sort. The noise of the scuffle, the women's cries and the child's alarm, however, drew the notice of the sentry, and the fun was short. He flung the gate open, entered, locked it behind him and parted the combatants with his bayonet, demanding the reason for the trouble. Both the offenders remained sullenly silent, and none of the other condemned could, or would speak as to the cause, while the women were ignorant as to the precise reason for the outbreak. "You are a pair of fine lads," sneered the sentry. "When ye're both a-going to be turned off to-morrow, to be quarrelling now. Have yer been doin' anythin' to the youngster?"

Neither would speak, but Blake interjected, "No, the fault is Pedder's." He saw that whatever had been the cause, Short was not to blame, and he recollected in the heat of the moment, that Short was the only one of the gang who could read. The one idea of the ballot was before his mind and not knowing how the message would come the agony of sus-

pense was increased by the fear that if the little trouble caused these men to be separated and Short to be taken out of the yard, any written message from their friend the "Fiver," might remain undeciphered. On this announcement, Pedder flushed with rage.

"You lie!" he cried, and would have struck Blake also if the sentry had not thrown up his musket and received the blow upon its barrel.

"Look here, me flash coves," said the soldier, "do you forget as yer have got to go to heaven to-morrow? Shake hands now, and if yer want to 'ave yer fight out, wait till yer git tother side o' Jordan."

The women in the ward caught the words and cheered the remark, but the woman by the gateway burst into tears, and this drew upon her the notice of the sentry.

"There yer are now, making the woman snivel, and you have frightened her kinchins too. Come," he said, "shake hands, or if yer don't, I'll have to separate yer; and surely," he chuckled as he spoke, "you'd like to have one last night together."

Blake, conscious all the while that his own share of the trouble and bother was due only to policy held out his hand, and so did Short. "After

all," thought the younger man, "life was going to be so short for them, unless the bullet fell to one or the other, that it was not desirable to dwell too much on the episode." But the other remained grim and silent.

"Shake hands," said the sentry sternly, "or I'll have you handcuffed." Pedder, still with the bullet ballot in his fancy (while he would have given half his brief tenure of life for the opportunity of thrashing one or the other) thought it would be wiser to obey, and shook hands.

The kindly Hawkesbury lass had been moved by a thought which was as creditable to her ingenuity as to her goodness of heart (while of course it was distinctly wrong from the point of view of a law-abiding citizen). She had wished to hint, through the medium of her child's frock, that they should escape. She had learned in the old Windsor schoolroom from Joseph Harpur, clerk, storekeeper, and schoolmaster, how to cipher and write, and with infinite labour in the dusk of that Sunday morning she had inscribed in coarse thread upon the hem of the little frock, a simple message. She had done it at imminent danger to herself, for any of the women might have

noticed when the soldier and gaolor were not likely to do so, the addition to the embroidery. She had inscribed with her needle and cotton, "Break out. Three guards to-night." And now her plot had failed, and the intuitions of Pedder, while pointing almost to the mark, had yet missed it narrowly.

When six o'clock came, the gloom of night had fallen again upon the yard. The eaves seemed to cast a deeper shadow, and the murmur of voices within the women's ward rumbled distantly, for the women could never shake off altogether the sense of what was due to Sunday. The noise of the city traffic was very slight, and the laughter of revellers returning by boat from Goat Island, which was a favourite place of resort for pleasure-loving Sydneyites, was so faint in the absence of a breeze, that the gaol might have been miles away from the city instead of being in its heart. The quietness of the time added to the awful tension. They would have been laughing and revelling among themselves had it not been for the anticipation of the "Ringer's" visit; but as it was, they knew the message which was to mean life to one and a double death to the other nine, might come at any moment. Possibly if the row had not

taken place in the afternoon, so severe was the strain, that one or two might have lost their mental balance. With the prospect of the ballot before them, there was no desire to indulge that vulgar and flippant spirit in which most condemned companies of the time, were wont to pass their last vigil. Short did sob hysterically for a few minutes after the retirement of the officer who had tapped his irons, and after he had received the courteous wish for a good night's sleep, and a pleasant hanging on the morrow; but with an effort, he had conquered himself and had waited, with the others, for the message, which at nine o'clock had not come. Lights went out at nine from the corridors, and darkness—and—hell reigned till the next morning.

VI.—AT TEN O'CLOCK P.M.

THE message came at last. The town clock in St. Philip's tower had struck ten a few minutes, when, following close upon the tramp of the patrol-men as they marched past the gaol, there sounded the footsteps of a solitary wayfarer. The watch, as they passed the gaol, had exchanged "All's well" with the gaol sentries, and following close as it did upon that

comforting salute, the challenge, "Who goes there?" of the guard at the gate opening on to the street, woke the echoes completely in the condemned yard.

It did more—it roused the condemned from the half lethargy, half sleep, in which they had passed the hour since the lights were put out. Stretched in their blankets, some were prone, some were supine on the flagging, all in severe tension of spirit, one or two seeking in the retrospect of memory for a vestige of that happiness which they had always sought for and which had ever evaded them. But with the echoing of that solitary wayfarer's voice, each man quivered and trembled, for each recognised the tones and knew the message had come. One by one they drew themselves up noiselessly; one by one each tore his blankets into strips; one by one each blanketed his irons so that there should be no ringing of chains against bazil, or clanking of link against the flagged stone. Even in these dread moments they were all subdued by a thrill of excitement at the anticipation of the communication. The dullest Norfolker had always been impressed by the rites and ceremonial of the "Ring," by what he knew of it or had heard of it, and nothing so

argued the utter imbecility of the successive administrators, and of the system that so far from fostering and turning into rational courses the imaginative sense of the prisoners, it had invariably diverted into the awful and the infernal, that it had not been crushed utterly. In the expectation of the ceremony, which they all inferred would occupy the next hour, they all forgot for the moment the doom that awaited them, or all but one of them, the next day. So vital and impressive are the processes of the imagination. They were to be taken out of themselves; that was the main thing, even though the issue of the ceremony would drive nine of them back into the very abysses of despair.

At last the door swung open, and without a creak scarcely, as though its hinges, its bolts, the wards of its lock had been newly oiled by an expert hand, and a man came in who had visited them before. They knew him, because this time he carried a dark lantern, with the slide partly freed so that his features and his features alone were visible. The aspect of that half-lit face emerging from darkness into darkness, and surrounded by darkness, was terrible in its weird fearsomeness, and young Short

could barely repress a groan. As it was, he threw out his hand convulsively, and caught the shoulder of the man next to him. With slippered or stockinged feet (he must have changed his boots in the outer room) he approached, not the group, but the wall of the women's cell. Quietly he put his hands between the bars and felt there as if he expected to meet, not the curtain which usually blocked the aperture at night time, but an inflexible substance such as a wooden or iron shutter. Apparently he was satisfied the arrangement he had made had been carried out, and then withdrawing his hand and adjusting the lantern slide till but a spot of light was visible, he drew towards the group. They trembled as he came near; even Pedder trembled, so uncanny was this outlined sombreness, moving amidst the gloom.

"Brothers," he said, in a low tone, that yet was not a whisper, as though he were now confident that he had protected himself from any audience save those whom he addressed. "Brothers, I have brought the message of the bullet. You, Short—which is Short? Short, where are you?"

He turned.

Short thrust forward his hand quietly till it touched the elbow of the "Outsider." "Here," Short said, "here."

"You, Short, can read. Read this."

Again the panel of the lantern was slid to the space of an inch, and the streak of light fell upon a piece of paper inscribed in a bold hand with certain words and marked with a symbol, which one and *all* of the "Ringers" knew as the sign manual of the "One."

As he held the paper for one moment the prisoners saw that he was pallid, and sweating great drops of perspiration. They saw, too, that utterance failed him for the moment.

"Read it."

With accents which shivered with their burden of agony, Short read from the paper. He did not recognise it as a symbol of the "One" that was appended, but he knew that it was authoritative by the imperious wording, and this man never doubted, for the "Ring" never deceived the prisoner.

"To our brothers of the condemned and to their brothers not yet of the 'Ring.' One of you can be saved, and one only. Choose ye by the ballot of the bullet. At eleven o'clock let each of you put his hand through the spy-hole, and

let the order of his going be known to no one save yourselves, not even to our bearer; and the one whom it pleases us well to select in a darkness as of the very grave to which all of you go, if not to-morrow, hereafter, he shall be chosen.

"Let there be no dispute, for this is the will of the 'Ring' in the session of the 'One' and the 'Three,' and though the 'Ring's' laws must be obeyed without demand of reason or demur, yet ye may be told why the choice should not be made from the 'Ring' members alone, and why those outside of us shall be permitted to test the ballot as well. We give no reason but this, and let it suffice. It is to test your obedience, and your obedience only. Men go, the 'Ring' stays on; and it is well that our dread society shall know men can obey it, even to their hurt and their death.

"At eleven of the clock, brothers, into the hand of the one that is to be saved shall the bullet be dropped, and the possession of that bullet shall warrant him that the 'Ring' fails not in what it undertakes. He may not know how he will be saved, but he shall be saved."

In a silence like that of their own graves already dug were these words read, in whisper-

ing voice, and amid the falling night and in the intentness of their hearing they heard no other sound, not even the whimpering of children, or the muttered oath of women in the adjacent dormitory. Scarce heard they even the louder noise of the ringing of the musket stocks as the night guards changed. The reading finished, the "Outsider," the "Fiver," said,—

"For this once shall the new men—the six foreign to the 'Ring'—be with us thus far. They shall take the oath that if one of them gain the bullet he shall be bound to us as though he were our own. What do you say, brothers?"

Pedder, Blake, Drummer, and Donnell knew clearly enough that the request for their assent was merely formal, but each, reeling almost from the suspense, said "Yes." Then the oath was administered. With crossed hands each took it, and each swore by the most impious of impieties that, the System being what it was, he would be its enemy and the enemy of all who thought to subjugate it.

* * * *

Then he bade the six move to the wall, and led the four in their last "Ring" session.[1]

[1] For a description of the "Ring" sessions, see the author's *Tales of the Early Days.*

As it was conducted, the "Fiver" retired to the corridor. Blake gasped, and said to Short in a strident undertone, "Short, pray that you may miss the bullet; if you get the bullet you'll be 'Ring' member. Better dead!"

VII.—AN HOUR LATER

ONCE more had St. Philip's clock struck, and once more had the patrolling watchmen exchanged "All's well!" with the sentries of the gaol. And the Ten, with faculties tense and alert, moved involuntarily as they identified the sounds. The hour of ordeal had arrived. Those of them who were doomed to die would face death lightly, perhaps flippantly, but here was the balancing of Fates—death or freedom. They would have been less even than the human animals they were if they could have prepared for the ballot with lightness of heart.

The first dispute arose over the order of their going to the door. Only the "Fiver"—the "Outsider"—knew to which man in order of procession would he give the bullet. It might, so far as the Ten knew, be to the first—it might be to the last. Really, the odds were against the

first as much as against the tenth, and as much for the sixth or seventh as for any other. Still, the dullest convict had his superstitions. They would all have gone third if they could.

"Go," at last, after confused whisperings that merged into anger, declared Pedder, "in order of age. You are the oldest, Drummer; go 'long. Name your ages; no lyin' now."

No one lied.

Drummer said he was fifty-five.

Short answered next, "Nineteen!" Lewis said he was thirty-six, just over; he had spent his birthday in gaol. Hanley was forty.

"I'm in my twenty-fifth year," whispered McCarthy, "and it's likely I'll not see the end of it." It was a poor jest, but it told for the instant.

Pedder gave his age thirty-two. "That's mine, too," said Donnell; "what month?"

Pedder didn't know, and said so. "When was Donnell born?"

"The first of April!" Another low chuckle.

How was that point to be settled? It took but a second to decide. In that instant Blake had pulled off three buttons from his jacket. (It was contract thread, and parted with readiness.) "Here," he said, "I have two buttons in

one fist and one in the other? Who chooses? Odd or even?"

"I'll take first," said Pedder, and he felt for Blake's left hand. "Odd!"

"'Tis even," whispered Blake.

"Then I'll be younger 'n you, Mike," said Donnell, "you can go first." And so that point was got over.

Blake was twenty-five, Clyde was twenty-four, and Entworth forty-one. So this was the order: Drummer, Entworth, Hanley, Lewis, Pedder, Donnell, Blake, Clyde, McCarthy (a month younger he was than Clyde), and Short. Short was the "baby."

They drew deep breaths as this first stage was over. Then—

"No cokumin'," said Pedder impressively, "who is given the bullet keeps it to himself. He is not to say without orders. An' them who do not get the bullet, well, they should die game, 'Ringers' or no 'Ringers.' They'll have had their chance. Fall in!"

They fell into line, stooping, every man of them, so as to hold their irons up and save clanking. Noise would have robbed the ceremony of something of its awesomeness. And they filed up slowly—so slowly.

Tremblingly, the old man put his hand through the spy-hole—which should have been closed, but was open. Open by the "Ring's" orders!

A finger-tip touched his open palm, but—no bullet. And he knew the bullet was not for him.

Entworth followed, and murmured as the warm finger touched his icy palm. He thought for the moment that he was the fortunate one. For the moment only.

Hanley and Lewis went forward, and slunk back into silence. Not one of the four knew aught as to the others' luck or ill-luck. All he knew was he was not the successful one.

Something had told the gang that Pedder would win the bullet, and, indeed, though they could not guess how it would be possible for the "Outsider" to discern Pedder, yet they feared in a vague manner that "The One" might have some occult means of intimating to the other. But there was no sign from Pedder to indicate success or failure as he withdrew his hand.

So they went on—Donnell, Blake, Clyde, McCarthy, Short. Each put his hand through, and each withdrew it.

And one alone held the silver bullet, and he was the last to protrude his hand, and the last to withdraw it. Short had not prayed, and he had won the bullet!

* * * *

He did not tell them; but they knew it, for, striving to reach his corner, he stumbled, fainted, and fell, something dropped with a deadened sound on the flags from his hand. And then—

They had all heard it drop. There was the passport to freedom—the warrant of the "One" which should give the fortunate holder entrance once again to the house of Life, perhaps to the house of Happiness, perhaps to that of Fortune.

And there it was lying on the ground, and its rightful owner fainting, powerless, defenceless.

For one minute there raged in each breast the infirmities of wrong, danger, and cupidity. Why should not they search for the bullet and the finder keep it?

The same thought held possession of each. There was a rush, a throwing away of caution, a contempt for the possibilities even of the "Ring's" vengeance. They had nothing to fear from the law; but from the "Ring" the bullet holder who held it wrongfully would have

much. Still, they forgot the chances, and all rushed to where Short's prostrate form was lying. Short's life in that instant was not worth a breath's purchase.

Yet he lives!

For Blake, who though tempted, yet withheld himself from yielding. He had joined in the rush, but his shred of conscience rescued him from what, after all, he felt to be a shame inexpiable. In the same movement which had propelled himself forward, he threw himself over the body of the youth.

"Touch him, or the bullet," he whispered hoarsely, "and I call the guard, the 'Ring' can't hurt me after to-morrow."

They halted. They receded. After all, had not Short won the ballot fairly? So the whisper went round.

And then they came forward again, but this time carefully and slowly. Each "was going to be a true man to the 'Ring' and one another." They began to look for the bullet.

It was Pedder who found it. It had rolled into the corner. "Here it is," he said, and felt his way to the group which stood, a protuberance of gloom, amid the darkness, "and 'tis wrapped in paper."

"Them's his instructions," said Blake.

"Wot," murmured McCarthy, "would have been the good of them to us who can't read?"

Had it been light, Pedder would have been seen to smile. "Trust the 'Ring' for that," he said. "Pedder knew the 'Ring.' The 'Ring' could write in hieroglyphics so as to reach the brain of the most ignorant.

* * * *

That, indeed, was the case. When Short came to himself he found on one side of the piece of paper a rough sketch of a woman in prison costume. On the other, was the same woman emerging from the prison door, and being met by a group of sailors. That was at four o'clock.

* * * *

At six, they were taken into the corridor to meet the chaplain and to breakfast. At eight they were mustered to meet the sheriff and his myrmidons, and then only was it discovered that there were no longer ten but nine.

* * * *

When they mounted the platform and looked around for the last time they most of them gazed towards the mass of faces which crested Essex Street heights. But Pedder, he had taken with that master eye of his, a compre-

hensive glance over the gaol. In one of those remarkable intuitions which crystallize a lifetime of experience into the last hours of the dying, he saw the whole arrangement of the gaol, and understood how simple a thing it would have been for the gang, once freed from their irons—easy enough to do—to have conquered the garrison and the gaol. He understood also what the message on the frock had meant.

In his dying speech he did not curse the crowd ; he cursed himself and his colleagues.

"Brothers," he shouted, "what fools we were! We could have jumped as easily as we stayed. What fools! What —— fools!"

"It's all right," said McCarthy, "we'll be wiser next time."

But the trap-door fell a few minutes later, and no one can say whether they were wiser then.

* * * *

Among the crowd which lined the height was a pallid faced girl, and tightly screwed within her neckerchief was a silver bullet. She had been freed from gaol that morning.

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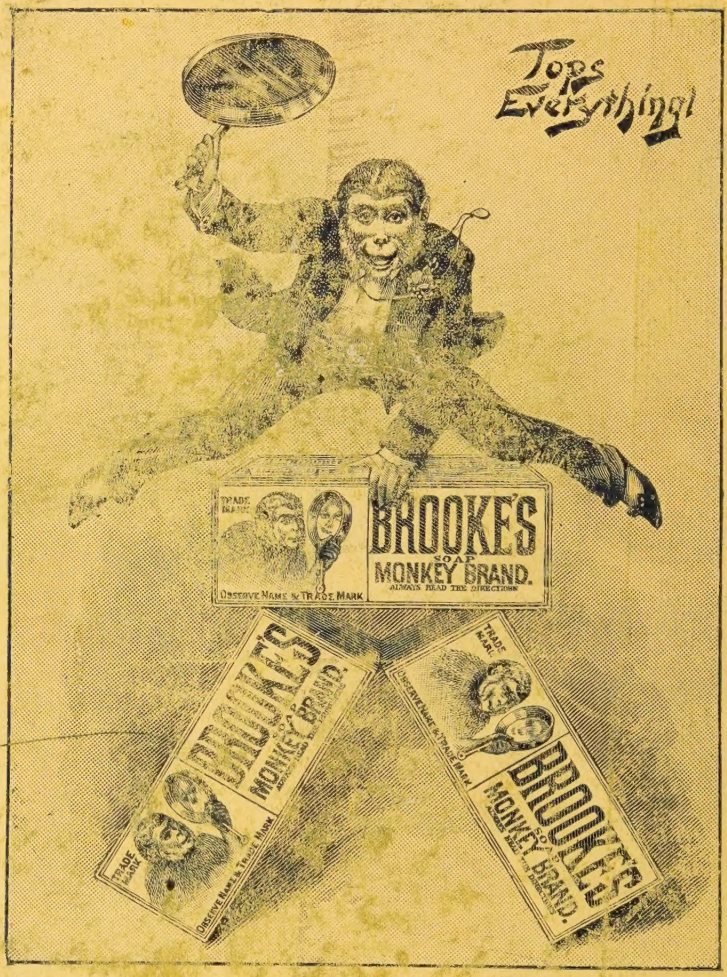

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